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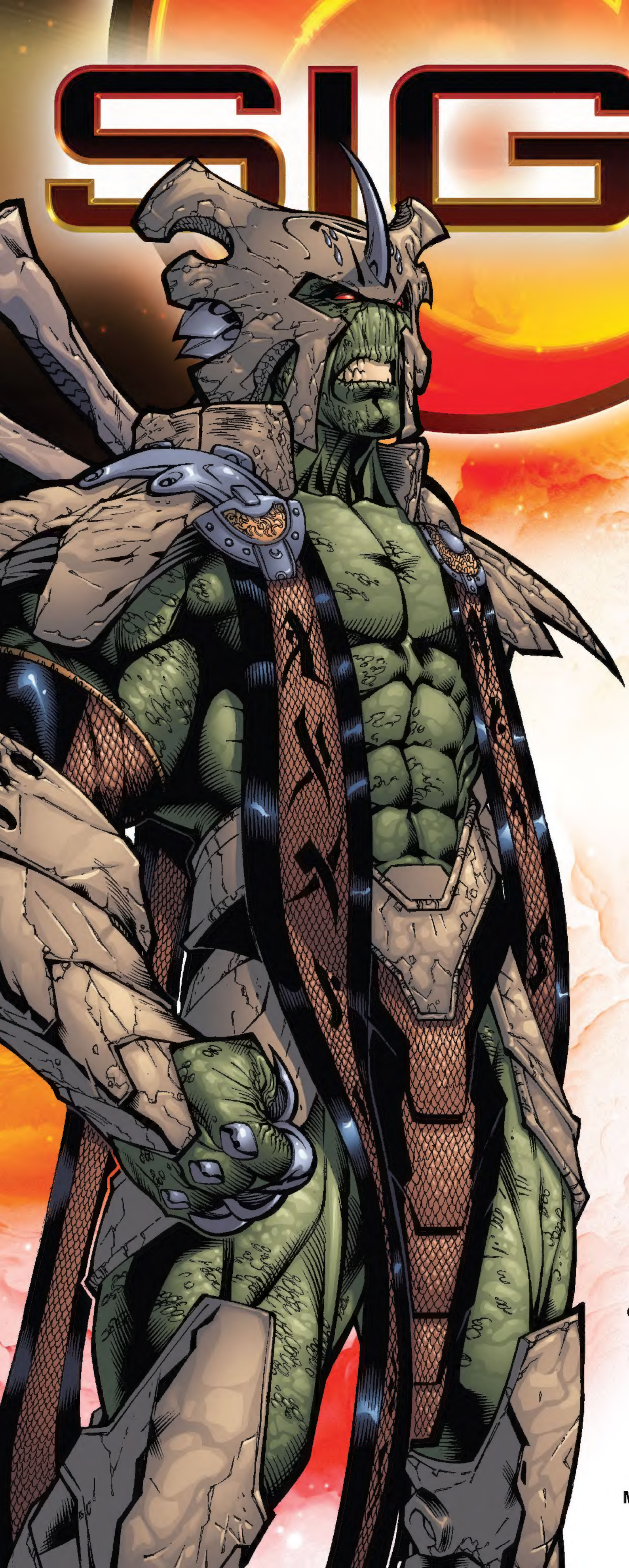
SIGIL

SIGIL



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This place grows colder, my friend. Its energy wanes. I am seeking a solution, and eagerly welcome your thoughts.

It is not like you to be so troubled.

So long ago, when it was all set in motion, it was so... fascinating in its complexity. It surprised even me. Now things are static, worlds grow cold, and what were once glorious fields of battle lay still and barren.

The problem is not simply lazy warriors. The vital energies on which we all depend are fading away... it shouldn't happen like this... yet it is! It is dying, and the First do *nothing* to prevent it!

Because the First don't understand. They have no idea of the connection between their actions and the Whole.

Yes. They need... motivation. They must be forced to reignite the cycle...

Yet...they know nothing of my existence. To do so would *change* them...

Why look only to the First?

There are many worlds open to you, so many people...

If you were to step in quietly -- walk among them. Then a subtle touch, to add just a small mark of your passage -- a sign.

Your sign.

Imagine... each world, one soul, marked with the sigil. Opened to the power.

Why just one?

I was thinking in terms of efficiency. The number is unimportant. A small number makes for a clear burden on each; too many, and they let someone else do the work.

As we have already seen with the First. Still...

Come...

HERE... A WORLD WITH UNTAPPED POTENTIAL EAGERLY AWAITING A FOCUS.

A shame that no one here has touched the nature of the mysteries of the Whole before now. The lives of these people must be so very plain.

THEY'RE ON THE EDGES OF AN INTERSTELLAR WAR. I DON'T THINK THEY HAVE THE LEISURE TO PROPERLY APPRECIATE THEIR BOREDOM.

At least they understand the nature of conflict. That's half the battle.

Hmmmm... and conflict forms leaders...

I have a feeling about this place.

What will I tell them, these... *Sigil-Bearers?*

GIVE THEM NO WARNING, NO DIRECTION; LET THEIR ACTIONS DICTATE THE FLARE OF THE SIGIL.

THIS WILL REENERGIZE YOUR WARRIORS. BRING THEM BACK TO THEIR PURPOSE. HAVE THEM FIGHT OFF THE CHILL OF THEIR CURRENT ENNUI.

You mean Cross-Generation.

YES, POWER FROM CONFLICT. ENERGY CREATING ENERGY.

AS THE NEW ONES WORK TOWARD THEIR OWN DEFINITION, THEY SERVE YOUR NEEDS.

I TELL YOU, YOU COULD START A NEW CHAIN OF CREATION TO STOKE THE COOLING FIRES OF THE WHOLE.

I FEEL IT GROWING WARMER ALREADY.

SO WE'VE GOT ENOUGH TO LAST THE WEEK, BUT IF NO WORK SHOWS UP BY THEN...

...I'LL JUST SELL MYSELF TO THE SULTAN AND YOU CAN LIVE OFF THE PROCEEDS.

SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN TO ME.

YEAH?

I HEAR YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOME TOOTH'N' CLAW...

WELL, FRIEND, FOR ONLY THIRTY G-CREDS, I CAN LEAD YOU TO SOME OF THE FINEST PSEUDOSAUR ACTION AVAILABLE ANYWHERE. JUST FOLLOW ME.

Oh, NO.

SAM -- AREN'T WE TRYING TO KEEP THINGS *UNCOMPLICATED?*

SURE. STARTING TOMORROW.

HERE WE GO AGAIN...

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THIS SETUP... RIPE FOR A RAID.

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE HONNA'S PRISONS FROM THE INSIDE.

HAVE A LITTLE FAITH IN ME, ROIYA--

-- I WON'T LET YOU BE CAPTURED *ALIVE*.

Heh.

YEAH.

PLAYERS, YOU KNOW THE RULES. IF YOU DON'T, LEARN THEM NOW. NO REFUNDS.

STAY IN YOUR PODS -- NO OPERATORS INSIDE THE ARENA AT ANY TIME.

IF WE GET RAIDED, PODS AND EXITS OPEN AUTOMATICALLY. WE DON'T POST BAIL, SO DON'T GET CAUGHT.

GO ON IN, FUNNY GUY. YOU'RE IN POD SIX.

THE OTHER PLAYERS ARE ALREADY CONFIGURED, SO YOU BETTER HOP IN AND LOG ON.

PSEUDOSAURS ARE NOT TOYS!

YOU'RE *KILLING* THEM!

MOVE IT, BUDDY. NO SAURIANS IN HERE.

AT THE SIGNAL, ENTER RAPPORT WITH YOUR SAUR.

THIS IS POD SIX, *READY*.

GOTCHA, POD SIX. TO CONTINUE: THE POD CONTROLS PUT YOU IN COMMAND OF YOUR PSEUDOSAUR'S MOVEMENTS, SPEED, AND LEVEL OF FEROCITY.

VREEEEEET

ONCE COMBAT BEGINS, THE MATCH CONTINUES UNTIL ONLY ONE 'SAUR IS LEFT MOVING

THE WINNER MUST SURVIVE COMBAT OR THE HOUSE TAKES THE STAKE

READY...?

GO!

GRAWWR

DO YOU COME TO THIS BLOODBATH OFTEN?

THIS ISN'T *MY* IDEA OF FUN. I'M JUST HERE WITH MY FRIEND.

FRIEND? NO PREFIX ON THAT?

DEPENDS ON WHO'S ASKING...

"...THERE'S A LOT OF PREDATORS OUT THERE."

NOT ME. I PREFER A GENTLER KIND OF GAME.

WHICH NATURALLY LED YOU TO THE PSEUDOSAUR PIT.

YOU TWO *MIND?*

GRAWWRF

I'M TRYING TO *CONCENTRATE!*

GRAWWR

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE'RE DOWN TO A CLASSIC TRIANGLE.

TWO GUYS AND ONE LADY LEFT--

WE ALL KNOW *THAT'S* GONNA END IN A FIGHT

LOOKS LIKE THE LADY'S MADE HER CHOICE...

OH, TOO BAD. REJECTION BY DEGUTTION!

WE'RE DOWN TO TWO! NUMBERS FIVE AND SIX ARE STILL IN THE GAME, FOLKS!

ONLY ONE WILL WALK AWAY!

THIS IS AN HONOR, POD SIX!

YOU DON'T OFTEN SEE GUYS OF YOUR VINTAGE STILL TAKING ON A CHALLENGE THAT REQUIRES SPEED AND SKILL!

YOU REMIND ME OF A SAURIAN I KNOW...

...COCKY SONUVA. THINKS HE'S MY MATCH.

I CALL HIM "LOSER" TOO!

THAT TAKES CARE OF LUNCH TOMORROW.

I WAS THINKING DINNER TONIGHT. INTERESTED?

SULTAN RONOLO! THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO MEET WITH ME.

YOU KNOW I ALWAYS ENJOY OUR TALKS, MIKEL -- EVEN IF YOU ONLY SUFFER MY PRESENCE IN HOPES THAT *THIS* TIME I WILL FINALLY SET MY SEAL TO THE VESPER ACCORD...

...OR IS IT JUST THAT YOU ENJOY THE VIEW FROM MY PRIVATE LANAI?

BOTH, ACTUALLY. YOUR WIVES ARE BEAUTIFUL AND THE PLANETARY UNION *REALLY* WANTS THAT ACCORD.

OKAY, HERE'S THE SPIEL:

DON'T FORGET THAT IT WAS THE UNION THAT GRANTED YOUR PREDECESSOR THIS WAYSTATION WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT TANIPAL WOULD CONTINUE TO ALLY ITSELF WITH THE FIVE WORLDS OF THE UNION.

IT'S TIME TO RENEW, YOU'VE LET IT LAPSE, AND NOW YOU'RE PLAYING US AGAINST THE SAURS.

FOR HOW LONG?

THE SAURIAN FORCES ARE MASSING JUST SHORT OF TANAPALI SPACE.

IF YOU SIGN, YOU'VE GOT OUR PROTEC--

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING TO A WORD I'M SAYING, ARE YOU?

JUST A MOMENT, MIKEL.

TEO, ATTEND ME.

GO SEE WHAT'S WRONG...

"...I COUNT TWELVE."

GO ON, MIKEL -- YOU WERE PLAYING TO MY SUPPOSED HUMAN PARANOIA AS REGARDS THE SAURIANS.

JUST DOING MY JOB. WE NEED YOU TO SIGN, ESPECIALLY NOW...

I DO GOOD BUSINESS WITH THE SAURIANS. THEY TRUST ME.

BUT CAN YOU TRUST THEM?

DO YOU ACTUALLY REALIZE HOW MANY SAURIAN SHIPS ARE IN YOUR SPACE RIGHT NOW?

AT THE MOMENT, I'M FAR MORE INTERESTED IN ANOTHER NUMBER...

TWELVE.

I'M SORRY, MIKEL. I MUST DEAL WITH A SPOUSAL DISCIPLINARY MATTER BEFORE WE RESUME.

ENJOY THE VIEW UNTIL I GET BACK --

"...YOU WON'T SEE ANYTHING LIKE IT OUTSIDE OF MY GARDEN."

SCORE: SAM, ONE. HOUSE, *NONE.*

SO WHERE'S YOUR NEW FRIEND?

WE'RE MEETING LATER.

WELL, YOU WILL NOT BELIEVE THE WOMAN I JUST SAW. SHE'S--

SHE'S FOR *SALE,* SAM.

HEADS UP, SULTAN'S GUARDS.

WE'RE BUSTED.

ATTENTION! THIS IS NOT A RAID!

I REPEAT: THIS IS NOT A RAID! THIS IS ONLY AN INTERROGATION!

HEEEY!

YOU SHOULDN'T BE HIDING BACK THERE! IT'S BAD FOR BUSINESS!

HOW'RE YOU GONNA LURE MY WINNINGS AWAY IF YOU--

YOU...

YOU...

YOU SHOULDN'T BE HIDING BACK THERE. IT'S DANGEROUS HERE.

GO HOME. *PLEASE.*

WE WILL BE PASSING AMONG YOU WITH A HOLO.

ONE OF THE SULTAN RONOLO'S WIVES HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED.

ALL SHIPS ARE GROUNDED UNTIL SHE IS SAFELY RECOVERED.

ALL CITIZENS AND VISITORS ARE ADVISED TO JOIN THE SEARCH FOR ZANNIATI.

THIS MIGHT MEAN WORK, SAM.

REAL WORK. C'MON!

IN A MINUTE. JUST ONE MORE GAME -- MY LUCK'S RUNNING HOT TONIGHT!

"FINE."

TCHLUSARUD HAS DIRECTED ME TO ANSWER ONE QUESTION:

SINCE WE ARE ACTING IN VIOLATION OF TREATY...

...ARE WE CERTAIN THE HUMAN IS INSIDE?

THIS ONE WAS REPORTED TO BE AN EXACT MATCH TO THE HOLO WE RECEIVED...

...BUT THEY ALL LOOK ALIKE TO ME.

SAM... DO THE SAURIANS SEEM EDGY? THINK THEY HAVE INFO ON THE RUNAWAY BRIDE?

OR MAYBE THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE...

...Uh, oh.

SAM! INCOMING!

WHERE--?

LOOK UP --

SAURIANS!

OUR INFORMANT WAS CORRECT -- THE HUMAN *IS* HERE!

KREESH

KRAKK

KRAKK

AIEEE!

YOU'RE A GAMER -- THINK OF THIS AS THE REVENGE OF THE PSEUDOSAUR!

KRAPOW

I *KNEW* THIS WAS A BAD IDEA.

SAM! *CATCH!*

YOU SAVING MY BUTT AGAIN, ROI?

NOT THAT I'M COMPLAINING.

SKAPOW

WHEEEEEEN

NOW, I WOULDN'T BE COUNTING ON ENJOYING THAT REWARD, *CORPSE.*

DO YOU NEED SOME HELP WITH THAT, PRETTY LADY?

DO I *LOOK* LIKE IT?

YES. BUT I FIND THAT APPEARANCES ARE OFTEN DECEIVING.

TELL YOU WHAT --

-- IF YOU CAN USE THAT, I CAN GET US OUT OF HERE ALIVE.

TRUST ME.

SAM? POP ANALYSIS -- THIS IS *STRANGE* --

-- EVEN FOR LOSER.

THEY'RE JUST KILLING --

TAKE A DEEP BREATH, TRACHY.

THERE'S NO *PLAN* HERE.

THERE'S NO OBJECTIVE, JUST A TARGET --

U.S!

AM I RIGHT, UGLY? LOSER'S SO HOT TO GET SAM AND ME HE'S GONE *TERRORIST?*

WE WERE SENT TO CAPTURE SAMANDAHL REY. ALL OTHERS ARE EXPENDABLE.

LUCKY ME -- SAM GETS ALL THE CREDIT. *AGAIN.*

WILL YOU LOOKIT THAT?

GRAWWR

TOO BAD, SOLDIER BOY --

GRAEEEENK

-- THE *TOYS* ARE ON *MY* TEAM.

HRAEEEENK

C'MERE, FELLA!

LET'S CALM YOU DOWN.

KLIK

I DON'T NEED A ROGUE PSEUDOSAUR WITH A KILL-PAC.

THAT'S BETTER, huh?

ROIYA!

I *SEE* HIM, SAM. *YOU'VE* GOT MY GUN -- HE'S YOURS!

ALWAYS *ME* TAKIN' OUT THE TRASH! DON'T WORRY -- I GOT IT!

I GO--
OOOF!

NO! GRAH-- UK!
YOU CAN'T--
YOUR EYES...

WHAT THE HELL KIND OF SAURIAN ARE YOU?
YOU... YOU WILL FIND THEM, GATHER THEM, AND LEAD THEM.

UNHF!

YOU'RE TOO STRONG FOR NON-COMBATANT CASTE --
ROIYA!

Uh, SAM? I THOUGHT YOU GOT--

AAAAAH!

SKRREEEENCH

SPLUTCH

ROIYA!

GRAWWWR

TOO LATE, APESPAWN.

YOUR WOMAN IS *MEAT.*

SKKWWZ

MEAT?

THAT WOULD MAKE *ME* ONE HIGH-CALIBER COW.

YOU--!

IF SHE'S DEAD, THERE'S NO GOD THAT'LL SAVE YOU FROM ME!

YOU GOT THAT?!

IF YOU ONLY KNEW...

NO... NO... NO...

ROIYA...?

HANG ON...

SAM...?

SAM? WE'VE GOT TO GET TO YOUR SHIP.

GET YOUR CLAWS OFFA HER!

WE?

LISTEN.

SAM, MAYBE SHE CAN STILL BE SAVED.

TRUST ME.

TRUST YOU? YOUR PAL TOOK OUT THAT SAUR! YOU'RE GOLDEN.

SHOULDN'T WE GET HER TO AN EMERGENCY MEDIK?

THEY WOULDN'T TAKE HER. WE'RE NOT FROM TANIPAL, WE'RE OFFICIALLY INDIGENT, AND IT HAPPENED IN A NO-LAW ZONE.

F'*COURSE!* THOUGH WITH THE HANGARS IN LOCKDOWN...

YOUR SHIP HAS A MEDIK?

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.

TANIPALI SECURITY.

MY DAY JOB.

ALTHOUGH I'M IN THE PROCESS OF EXECUTING MY SUDDEN RESIGNATION.

STAY WITH ME, ROIYA... PLEASE.

WE'RE ALMOST TO THE MEDIK. I'LL GET YOU THERE IN TIME.

HELP ME ATTACH THIS. THE SENSORS ARE RIGHT OVER--

SHE'S CONNECTED.

THANKS.

ROIYA... I'M SO SORRY. SCANS LOOK BAD, BUT KEEP IT TOGETHER FOR ME... I CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE WITHOUT YOU...

NO, SAM..

...LET ME GO.

NOOOO

HRMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

HRMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

SECURITY! REPORT!
GET DOWN!
GUARDS! WHAT'S HAPPENING!
ROIYA!
HRMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

SAM?
SAM!

HRMMMM

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ROIYA...

...I'M S' SORRY. YOU DEPENDED ON ME...

...AND I WASN'T THERE FOR YOU.

YOU ALWAYS HAD *MY* BACK. I DIDN'T HAVE YOURS WHEN IT COUNTED, AND YOU PAID THE PRICE.

SO YOU WIND UP *DEAD* AND I GET AWAY WITHOUT A SCRATCH EXCEPT FOR THIS DAMN THING BURNED INTO MY CHEST. SOME TIRED EXCUSE FOR A PARTNER I AM.

FORGIVE ME, ROIYA. FOR WHAT HAPPENED...

...AND FOR ALL THE THINGS THAT *NEVER* HAPPENED.

UHFF!

K-BOOM

EVASIVE ACTION.

THAT WAS A CANNON BLAST AND EVASIVE ACTION.

WHAT THE HELL'S HAPPENING TO MY *SHIP?!*

PASSENGERS. OKAY...

...I NEVER GOT *NAMES* OUTTA YOU TWO IN ALL THE EXCITEMENT PLANETSIDE.

JeMERIK MEER. AND SHE'S...

...WELL, SHE'S THE ONE WHO KNEW ENOUGH ABOUT SPACECRAFT TO GET THIS ONE FLYING.

YOU'VE BEEN UNCONSCIOUS EVER SINCE WE LEFT TANIPAL.

I'M GLAD YOU'RE ALL RIGHT...um...

SAM. Uh... YEAH, YOU TOO.

WHAT DID YOU SAY YOUR NAME—

HANG ON!

KROOM

AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, TELL ME WHO'S PILOTING THE *BITTERLUCK* ***NOW.***

MEER! WHAT'S GOING ON? WHO'S CHASING US?

LET'S SEE...

...THERE'S THE SAURIANS, I'M *REAL* SURE ABOUT THEM.

AND DEFINITELY THE SULTAN'S GUARDS.

PROBABLY EVEN SOME UNION CRUISERS BEFORE TOO LONG.

YOU'VE GOT A TALENT FOR MAKING ENEMIES, SAM. WHO'S *CHASING* US...?

WHO *ISN'T?*

THEN SIT YOURSELVES DOWN AND STRAP YOURSELVES IN, IT'S ABOUT TO GET EVEN BUMPIER.

PICKED THE RIGHT *NAME* FOR THIS OLD BUCKET.

WE'VE BEEN DAMN LUCKY SO FAR...

...BECAUSE THERE'S NO WAY THE SHIP'S COMPUTER HAS THE REASONING CAPACITY TO FLY THIS SLICK ON AUTO PILOT.

I DO NOW, SAM.

THAT...

...IT CAN'T BE...

...BUT THAT WAS ROIYA'S VOICE.

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TANIPAL:
ROYAL CITY OF HONNA, DISASTER SITE.

HENSON UNDERWRITERS CASE FILE 5659 AGF, INVESTIGATING THE DESTRUCTION OF HONNA RESIDENTIAL/GAMING BLOCKS 41-89.

YOU'RE THE ONE WITH THE EXPERIENCE IN THE UNEXPLAINED...

...HOW DO WE LABEL THIS ONE?

FOOLS. A LABEL WON'T EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED HERE.

SO MANY LIVES LOST, AND THEIR ONLY CONCERN IS THE MONEY.

THEY SHOULD BE CONCERNED WITH THE ***POWER***.

MASSIVE DESTRUCTION FROM A WEAPON THAT MADE NO SOUND AND LEFT NO DISCERNIBLE TRACE: NO HEAT, NO RADIATION.

ACT OF GOD?

COLLATERAL DAMAGE FROM WARFARE?

NO, WE NEED A DECLARATION OF WAR TO INSTITUTE DENIAL OF CLAIM ON THAT BASIS.

THIS DISASTER APPEARS TO BE THE WORK OF UNLICENSED TECHNOLOGY. NEW WEAPONRY.

SO YOU'RE SAYING IT'S A TERRORIST ACT.

YOU'RE FORGETTING TO FACTOR IN CURRENT EVENTS.

IF TANIPAL WAS COVERED UNDER THE PLANETARY UNION'S VESPER ACCORD, WE'D BE OBLIGATED TO COVER TERRORISM.

BUT IT'S NOT.

THE SULTAN'S KEEPING BOTH SIDES HANGING.

SO WE CALL IT WHAT WE WANT -- HIS CLAIM WILL BE DENIED.

BUT-- CAN YOU SPOT THE *OPPORTUNITY* HERE?

WE FIND EVIDENCE TO LINK THIS INCIDENT TO THE SAURIAN ATTACK...

...THAT SOURS THE SULTAN'S DEALINGS WITH THE SAURIANS.

TANIPAL BECOMES A FORMAL HUMAN ALLY AGAIN.

WE GET A BONUS.

NO SAURIAN DID THIS.

BUT TRACKING WHAT DID WILL LIKELY LEAD ME TO MY QUARRY...

"...THE ONE WITH THE SIGIL."

SAM?

YOU GONNA TALK TO ME OR JUST SIT THERE LOOKING STUNNED AND STUPID?

I'M HEARING YOUR VOICE, ROIYA, BUT MY TWO EYES SAW YOUR DEAD BODY-- HOW C'N YOU BE TALKING WITH ME?

I LEFT MY BODY, TRUE, AND I CAN'T GO BACK-- BELIEVE ME, I'VE TRIED.

BUT, SAM, IF THIS IS DEAD... IT'S NOT SO BAD.

PARDON ME FOR NOT VOLUNTEERIN'! BUT HOW--?

DURING THAT EXPLOSION, I FELT MYSELF... **GO**, BUT SOMETHING CONNECTED ME WITH THE SHIP AND THEN I WAS **EVERYWHERE** INSIDE OF IT...

WHAT A HORRIBLE EXPERIENCE... TO BE TRAPPED IN DEATH...

BUT SHE'S *NOT* DEAD. THERE ARE ***MANY*** DIFFERENT FORMS OF LIFE...

I SCREWED UP, ROI. I SHOULD HAVE HAD YOUR BACK.

THOSE SAURS--

SNAP OUT OF IT, SOLDIER--

THE SAURIAN SHIPS ARE STRAFING AGAIN.

I NEED YOU IN THE **HERE** AND **NOW.**

GOTCHA.

SHOW ME WHAT'S OUT THERE.

FIVE SAURIANS -- THEY'RE ON YOUR DISPLAY.

GOT IT.

BUT WHAT I DON'T GET IS --

--WHY ARE THEY AFTER US?

ALL WE DID WAS GET AWAY FROM A BATTLE SCENE IN *OUR OWN* SHIP!

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

AND *YOU* -- NOT THAT THERE'S ANYWHERE YOU CAN GO, BUT KEEP CLOSE --

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT *YOUR* PART IS IN ALL THIS.

WE TOOK OFF DURING A LOCKDOWN AND IN THE MIDDLE OF A DISASTER, SAM...

...MAKING THE BITTERLUCK *EVERYBODY'S* FOCUS OF ATTENTION.

LUCKY US.

GET READY TO JOLT -- I'M LAUNCHING A KEYHOLE..

...MAYBE GIVE 'EM TIME TO FORGET WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THAT EXPLOSION.

TANIPAL: PLANETARY UNION EMBASSY.

GAENA, I HAVE JUST RECEIVED CONFIRMATION THAT THE EXPLOSION FOLLOWING THE SAURIAN ATTACK WAS ***NOT*** A SAURIAN WEAPON...

...ALTHOUGH THEY CAN'T TELL ME JUST WHAT IT ***WAS***.

GREAT. AN UNKNOWN WEAPON THAT GIVES NO WARNING AND LEAVES NO EVIDENCE.

CROSS, DO WE HAVE ***ANY*** CLUES?

WITNESSES PUT A SMALL SHIP, THE *BITTERLUCK*, AT THE HEART OF THE... ANOMALY.

VINZER?

MY MEN CHECKED OUT PORT RECORDS TO SEE WHO OWNS THE *BITTERLUCK* -- NAME OF ONE SAMANDAHL REY TURNED UP.

HUMAN.

WE HAVE DISPATCHED UNION GUARDS TO BRING HIM IN FOR QUESTIONING. THEY'RE ON AN INTERCEPT AND DETAIN RUN NOW.

THANK YOU, ALAI.

GENTLEMEN, WE REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF THE FIVE WORLDS HERE ON TANIPAL.

WE ALL KNOW THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF THIS WORLD TO THE PLANETARY UNION. THE SULTAN IS A ***VITAL*** ALLY.

BUT THIS MYSTERY WEAPON IS ***MORE*** IMPORTANT.

SO SEND ***MORE*** GUARDS, SEND ***EVERY*** AVAILABLE SHIP, ***CAPTURE*** THE *BITTERLUCK* AND BRING BACK THAT ***WEAPON!***

RIGHT NOW, IT'S IN HUMAN HANDS. KEEPING IT IN HUMAN CONTROL COULD CHANGE THE BALANCE OF POWER -- WE'D ALL LIKE THE SAURS AND THE SULTAN TO CATER TO ***US,*** RIGHT?

DO IT.

NOW LET'S TAKE A MINUTE HERE TO GET A FEW THINGS SORTED OUT...

FIRST OFF -- *WHAT* EXPLOSION? LAST THING I REMEMBER IS... YOU DYING.

*YOU'RE **KIDDING.** YOU MISSED **THAT?** I'LL PULL UP IMAGES.*

HOW COULD HE NOT REMEMBER?

HE WAS CAUGHT UP IN THE POWER... OF HIS GRIEF.

WHAT THE—?

A PSEUDOSAUR?

GRAWWR

HOW'D THAT THING GET IN HERE?

IT FOLLOWED US. I THOUGHT IT WAS YOURS.

I *PLAY* THEM, I DON'T PLAY *WITH* THEM!

PLAY NICE, SAM...

...I LIKE HAVING HIM ON BOARD.

HE STAYS!

LOOK: THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED ON TANIPAL.

IT'S A MIRACLE WE SURVIVED.

TANIPALI VIBE

RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS

CENTER

WELL SOME OF US DID, ANYWAYS...

VERY FUNNY, ROIYA.

BUT WHATEVER KINDA BOMB WENT OFF THERE... THAT'S SOME AMAZING POWER.

THINK THAT'S WHAT GAVE ME THIS MARK?

MORE PROPERLY A SIGIL THAN A MARK.

IT'S NOT JUST RANDOMLY PATTERNED FLESH -- SOMEONE BRANDED YOU.

Oh? SO YOU'RE OUR EXPERT ON ALL THIS? IS IT *YOUR* DOIN'?

NO, BUT I KNOW MAGIC WHEN I SEE IT.

YOUR FRIEND ROIYA SAID IT -- IT'S A MIRACLE. SEEMS WE WERE ALL TOUCHED BY IT.

YOUR CHEST, HER TRANSFORMATION, OUR ESCAPE...

JUST WHO *ARE* YOU? MEER, IS IT?

MERIK TO MY FRIENDS. UNTIL YESTERDAY, ONE OF THE SULTAN RONOLO'S SECURITY FORCE.

BEFORE THAT -- A TRAVELER. I WANDER HERE AND THERE, DO ODD JOBS IN ODDER PLACES...

SAM -- YOU TALKING TO HIM OR TO ME? LISTEN UP --

I RAN A CHECK OF HIS SCANS WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING IT OFF.

JeMERIK MEER **IS** ONE OF THE SULTAN'S GUARDSMEN...OR WAS.

HE'S ALSO THE GUY WHO WAS MAKING THE MOVES ON ME WHILE YOU WERE PLAYING WITH PSEUDOSAURS...

HE'S NO THREAT, AND NO PROBLEM, AT LEAST NOT WHILE I'M IN THIS FORM...

THE **WOMAN**, ON THE OTHER HAND, DOESN'T EXIST.

YOU WERE LEAVING TANIPAL. I HAD TO GET AWAY...

MY HUSBAND IS... A CRUEL MAN. WHEN JeMERIK FOUND ME, I WAS GOING TO COMMANDEER A SHIP TO GO HOME, TO ESCAPE...

INSTEAD I FOUND MYSELF FIGHTING BY YOUR SIDE.

WE... MET. I REMEMBER THAT...

BUT WHY ***MY*** SHIP?

I DIDN'T CHOOSE YOUR SHIP...

I CHOSE ***YOU.***

WHEN ROIYA WAS... ATTACKED...

I COULDN'T LEAVE YOU. ***SOMETHING*** MADE ME WANT TO HELP YOU... TO TRUST YOU...

YEAH, SOMETHING.

SO -- I GOT ME A DEAD FRIEND, A DRIFTER, A RUNAWAY, AND A BRANDED CHEST.

OKAY, DON'T ANYBODY TALK TO ME.

I GOTTA GO THINK.

TANIPAL: THE SULTAN RONOLO'S PALACE.

IS *THIS* HOW YOU ENFORCE OUR AGREEMENT?

FIRING ON MY WORLD? LETTING LOOSE NEW WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION?

JUST THINK OF THE COST: THE BUILDINGS *DESTROYED*, *THE LIVES LOST*, *THE REVENUES MISSING FROM THE GAMING CENTERS THAT NO LONGER EXIST!*

AND SOMEONE'S *STOLEN MY WIFE!*

TANIPAL HAS HAD A VERY AGREEABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU PEOPLE UNTIL THIS OUTRAGEOUS DISPLAY OF DISRESPECT!

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY FOR YOUR ACTIONS, TCHLUSARUD?

ARE YOU *FINISHED?*

FOR NOW. EXPLAIN YOURSELF, TCHLUSARUD.

OUR SYMPATHIES FOR THE DESTRUCTION VISITED UPON HONNA, RONOLO, BUT IT WAS NOT OUR DOING.

YOU ARE AWARE THAT A STATE OF PERSONAL VENDETTA EXISTS BETWEEN MYSELF AND THE HUMAN WE SOUGHT? IT IS A MATTER OF ***HONOR***.

SINCE TANIPAL AND MY WORLD ARE NOT ***FORMAL*** ALLIES, WE COULD NOT INFORM YOU OF OUR HUNT.

EVEN SO, FEW HUMANS WERE KILLED, BUT WE SAURIANS SUSTAINED GREAT LOSS OF LIFE FROM THE EFFECTS OF THE UNKNOWN WEAPON!

MAY I SUGGEST--

A ***PERMANENT*** TREATY WOULD AVOID ANY FUTURE ***MISUNDERSTANDINGS***.

TO SHOW OUR GOOD WILL IN THE CURRENT MATTER, TCHLUSARUD WILL PERSONALLY DELIVER TO YOU THE MISSING WIFE...

...AND THE HUMAN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RECENT MAYHEM.

GOOD, BUT NOT ENOUGH.

PERHAPS A SAURIAN ARC DRIVE WOULD BETTER COMPENSATE ME FOR MY PAIN AND LOSS...

...AND *INSPIRE* ME TO SIGN.

YOU'RE ASKING ME TO BETRAY MY PEOPLE BY GIVING AWAY OUR ADVANTAGE--

-- WHICH I'M SURE YOU WOULD ***NEVER*** GIVE TO THE OTHER HUMANS.

YOU ALREADY KNOW MY ANSWER IS ***NO***.

TANIPAL ORBITOWER, THIS IS SHUTTLE S-78 EN ROUTE TO SAURIAN SHIP MAKRUTHTE.

PROCEED, S-78. WE HOPE PRINCE TCHLUSARUD ENJOYED HIS VISIT.

OUR SHIPS HAVE GAUGED THE MOST LIKELY VECTORS AND ARE FOLLOWING THE HUMAN'S SHIP THROUGH A TRANSIT POINT.

TELL THEM TO EXECUTE DELAYING MANUEVERS TO ENSURE SAMANDAHL REY DOESN'T FALL INTO HUMAN HANDS BEFORE WE ARRIVE...

...THIS IS *MY* KILL.

GREETINGS, TANIPAL ORBITOWER. PLANETARY UNION FIGHTERS BEAR III AND LEMON SKY REQUESTING DATALOAD AND CLEARANCE FOR INTERCEPT RUN.

REQUEST LOGGED, BEAR.

THERE'LL BE A SMALL DELAY BECAUSE OF HEAVY TRAFFIC--

EVERYBODY WANTS THIS GUY!

CONFIRMATION RECEIVED. TARGET COORDINATES LOADING NOW -- CHECK YOUR DISPLAY.

THANKS, TOWER. WE'LL COME HOME WITH THE GUY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED PLANETSIDE.

INTERESTING...

ONE PRIZE...

...SO MANY SEEKERS...

SAM, WE'RE OUT OF THE KEYHOLE.

SAM...?

Aw, ROI...

WE'VE BOTH SEEN DEATH A HUNDRED TIMES OVER, SO WHY'S THIS ONE SEEM SO... WRONG?

I GUESS I NEVER REALIZED HOW MUCH YOU MEANT TO ME UNTIL...

SAM...

I'D BE LYING IF I DIDN'T SAY I'D RATHER STILL BE IN MY BODY THAN... HERE...

...BUT I'M HAPPY TO STILL BE AROUND.

MAYBE...

NO MAYBE ABOUT IT, ROI--

THE SAURS WILL PAY FOR THIS, DON'T YOU WORRY!

I MEANT MAYBE THERE'S A WAY TO PUT ME BACK TOGETHER.

SOMEHOW, THERE'S GOT TO BE AN *ACCOUNTING...*

IT'S GOT TO BE MADE RIGHT...

YOU'VE GOT TO BE *AVENGED!*

VREEPVREEP

VREEPVREEP

WHA--?

THE DOORS WON'T CLOSE..? DID *I* DO THAT?

LET'S FIND OUT--

LET'S *MAKE IT HAPPEN!*

HEY!

YOU--!

GRAWWWWR

AWRIGHT, YOU LITTLE STOWAWAY!

NO RUNNIN' LOOSE ON *MY* SHIP!

GRAWWWR

STAY PUT! I'M NOT GONNA HURT YOU!

GRAWWWR

AS LONG AS YOU RETURN THE COURTESY -- HEY, NOW!

MDRF

GRAWWWRP

Aw, LOOKIT YOU...YOU'RE NO THREAT, ARE YA?

BESIDES, ROIYA LIKES YOU AND SHE'S HAD A TOUGH ENOUGH DAY.

OKAY, SAM... WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE?

YOU MEAN THE PSEUDOSAUR OR THE GLOWING HAND ACTION?

THIS LITTLE GUY'S JUST ADOPTED ME, AND IT APPEARS I CAN MAKE THINGS *CHANGE* JUST BY WANTING TO.

WELL, YOU BETTER WANT TO COME PLAY PILOT, BECAUSE THE SAURS ARE BACK AND THERE'S MORE...INCLUDING TCHLUSARUD'S NEW BATTLE CRUISER.

GOOD! I'D LIKE TO GIVE LOSER A PRIVATE DEMONSTRATION OF THIS POWER.

LET'S GO GET 'EM, ROI.

Steve McNiven

Here's another fine example of Steve's artwork, this time featuring our favorite space-farers from Sigil. This piece was inked by Don Hillsman II and colored by Caesar Rodriguez. Steve was recently promoted from Associate Penciler to full-fledged status. Look for an 8-page Sigil backup story from him next ish!

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SAM, YOU WANT TO DO WHAT?!

YOU HEARD ME, ROI. I'M GONNA TAKE THIS FIGHT RIGHT BACK AT 'EM.

LESSEE, THREE, FOUR, FIVE SAURIAN CUTWING FIGHTERS...

SAMANDAHL REY, I FEEL FOR YOUR LOSS...

HANG ON-- YOU'RE CAUSING UPROAR IN THE VR FIELD.

...BUT ROIYA IS NOT DEAD. SHE LIVES ON IN THIS SHIP.

I SAID, ROIYA IS NOT DEAD, BUT SHE WILL DIE THE FINAL DEATH IF YOU TAKE US ALONG ON YOUR SUICIDE...

SUICIDE? YOU'RE SEEIN' THIS ALL WRONG...

...JUS' LOOK AT EVERYBODY OUT THERE WAITING ON OUR NEXT MOVE...

"...I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'M DOIN'."

SAURIAN CUTWING FIGHTERS

SAURIAN BATTLE CRUISER
JAHKEMRAH

30 YEARS IN SERVICE
ARC DRIVE RETROFITTED
CREW: 2,100
SPACECRAFT:
5-20 CUTWING FIGHTERS
10 SHUTTLECRAFT
2 HEAVY LANDERS

ROYAL SAURIAN
BATTLE CRUISER
MAKRUTHTE

2 YEARS IN SERVICE
ARC DRIVE EQUIPPED
CREW: 1,600
SPACECRAFT:
10-50 CUTWING FIGHTERS
10 SHUTTLECRAFT
2 HEAVY LANDERS

TAKE A LOOK--

WE'RE SURROUNDED. IF WHAT THEY WANTED WAS US DEAD, WE'D BE ANGELS ALREADY.

BUT THEY'VE BEEN CHASING US SINCE TANIPAL...

AN' THEY'RE GONNA KEEP CHASIN' US 'CAUSE THEY THINK WE'VE GOT THE WEAPON THAT BLEW THAT HOLE IN HONNA.

THEY'LL SACRIFICE THEMSELVES TO KEEP US SAFE UNTIL THEY FIND OUT DIFFERENT.

LET'S TEST. I'VE GOT A COMM FIX ON LOSER'S YACHT.

THAT'S TCHLUSARUD, THE YOUNGEST SAURIAN PRINCE AND KING OF IDIOTS.

VRREEP

LOSER. HOW'S THINGS BY YOU, OLD BUDDY?

*'SCUSE ME, DID I GET YOUR NAME WRONG, **TCHLUSARUD?***

WHAT'D YOU THINK OF MY LITTLE DEMO DOWN ON TANIPAL?

YOU OVERPLAYED YOUR HAND, SAMANDAHL REY.

WHAT DO YOU CALL YOUR NEW WEAPON THAT WILL SOON BE MINE?

IS IT NAMED IN MEMORY OF YOUR DECEASED COMPANION?

I HEAR SHE WAS A CASUALTY OF THE RAID TO GET YOU.

I'M PATIENT.

MY TROOPS WILL SOON BRING ME THIS WEAPON...

AND YOUR HEAD.

TCHLUSARUD?

Aw, YOU LEAVIN' ME WITHOUT A KISS?

DON'T ANTAGONIZE THE APE, MY PRINCE.

WE NEED THAT WEAPON.

WHY? WE HAVE THE NEW DRIVE.

TO BRING HOME ANOTHER ADVANTAGE WOULD BE TO RISE IN YOUR ELDER'S EYES...

...AND YOU PROMISED THE SULTAN HIS WOMAN.

YOUR COUNSEL IS WISE, GAUKRYDCK...

...I'LL *TRY* TO FOLLOW IT!

HEY, NOW! SOMETHING'S GOT UNDER YOUR SCALES...

...TOO BAD I'M JUST A HOLO ON YOUR END.

END TRANSMISSION

THIS IS PRICELESS. LOSER'S IN A LATHER.

HE WANTS THAT BOMB AND HE'LL SEE TO KEEPING US SAFE UNTIL HE CAN GET HIS CLAWS ON IT...

...A WEAPON WE DON'T AND NEVER HAD.

Uh, SAM... YOU MAY BE A LITTLE WRONG ABOUT THAT.

I'VE BEEN RUNNING AN ANALYSIS OF THE ENERGY PATTERN OF THAT LITTLE TRICK YOU PULLED ON THE DOORS AGAINST THE DATA FROM THE BLAST ON TANIPAL.

IT'S A DEAD MATCH, SAM.

WE DO HAVE THE WEAPON...

IT'S YOU.

TANIPAL: PLANETARY UNION ASSEMBLY

THE *BITTERLUCK* IS LICENSED TO SAMANDAHL REY WITH SURVIVOR'S RIGHTS LISTED TO ROIYA SINTOR...

...THE WOMAN WE'VE IDENTIFIED AS A CASUALTY OF THE SAURIAN ACTION YESTERDAY.

WITNESSES HAVE ALSO PLACED THE KIDNAPPED ZANNIATI ON THE *BITTERLUCK*...

...THE SHIP THAT LEFT TANIPAL AT THE HEART OF THE EXPLOSION.

WITHOUT SUSTAINING ANY DAMAGE FROM THE BLAST!

WE ASSUME THERE'S A CONNECTION, SULTAN RONOLO.

YOU CAN TELL YOUR MASTERS I DON'T HOLD THE PLANETARY UNION RESPONSIBLE, BUT I ***DO*** EXPECT YOUR ASSISTANCE APPREHENDING REY.

ALSO, MY GUARDS OBSERVED A SECOND MALE...

WHO WAS IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF YOUR OWN GUARDS...

"CORRECT. HE WAS OBSERVED TOUCHING MY WIFE..."

"...HE IS NOT TO RETURN ALIVE."

THE PARTY OUTSIDE'S GETTING BIGGER.

SEE HOW THOSE SAUR CUTWINGS ARE PEELING OFF'A US?

THAT MEANS THE SULTAN'S BOYS HAVE CAUGHT UP AND ARE BURNING THE SAURS' BUTTS.

SAURIANS I UNDERSTAND.

BUT WHY SO MANY OF THE SULTAN'S SHIPS?

THOUGHT HE WAS KIND OF LAX ABOUT LAWS...

I THINK ***SHE*** MIGHT HAVE A THEORY ABOUT THAT.

DON'T YOU...

...ZANNIATI?

YOU'RE --

--YOU'RE HURT?

WHO DID THAT TO YOU?

TO ME AND TWELVE OTHERS.

THE SULTAN REWARDED OUR FAMILIES WELL, BUT ***WE*** PAY THE PRICE.

MAKEUP OR SURGERY HIDES THE SCARS, BUT I WASN'T WILLING TO... ***HIDE*** ANYMORE.

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO.

OKAY...

SO WE'VE GOT THE SULTAN'S RUNAWAY WIFE.

IN ADDITION TO THE MYSTERY WEAPON THAT MIGHT BE ***ME***.

Oh, THIS IS ***PERFECT***.

...JUST PERFECT...

REMEMBER, ROIYA -- WITH OR WITHOUT A BODY, YOU'RE STILL ***MY*** FAVORITE.

OH, YEAH? WELL, WHEN I GET A NEW ONE, WE'LL JUST SEE ABOUT THAT.

OH, NO -- I JUST MEANT...

"...THEY'VE GOT MORE INCENTIVE TO KEEP US ALIVE IF WE'VE GOT THE SULTAN'S...

"...WIFE...

"...'CAUSE ALL HIS GUARDS'LL BE THROWING THEMSELVES IN THE WAY OF ANYTHING COMING AT US..."

TANIPAL THREE NINE. I HAVE THE BITTERLUCK SIGHTED AND LOCKED.

VREEEET

PROXIMITY ALERT.

WHA--?

THAT CUTWING, IT'S --

LOOKS LIKE PEACETIME'S DONE WITH.

STRAP IN, YOU TWO...

...I CAN'T STAND TO SEE HUMANS TAKE IT WITHOUT A FIGHT...

"...SO I'M GONNA THIN OUT THE LIZARD POPULATION."

"WATCH THIS ONE... TOSS A PROBE...

"...OPEN A KEYHOLE...

"...AN' GET 'EM TO CHASE THE RABBIT."

THEY'RE ONLY LIZARD BRAINS, SO THEY TAKE THE BAIT...

"AND WE BAIL WHILE THEY HIT THE KEYHOLE...

"...WHOSE COURSE IS SET TO BOOMERANG."

WATCH THAT SAURIAN BATTLER, NOW...

TRANSIT POINT OPENING! *CALL ALERT!* SHIELDS UP!

VREE-VREE!

"...'CAUSE THOSE SAURS ARE ABOUT TO RECEIVE SOME FRIENDLY FIRE!"

CLEVER TACTICS...

...BUT WHY NO SIGN OF THAT *POWER?*

HE'S PLAYING WITH US!

THAT SOULLESS *ALIEN!* NO WEAPON IS WORTH CHEATING ME OF MY REVENGE!

TELL THE FIGHTERS TO DISPERSE! GET US IN RANGE SO *I CAN* KILL HIM!

SAM? YOU WANNA TRY YOUR HAND AT SOME REPAIRS?

SOON?

IF WE MOVE, I'LL COME APART.

ALREADY ON IT.

SOON'S I PATCH UP THIS SECTION, I'LL SUIT UP AND SEE IF THIS POWER WORKS IN SPACE.

I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA! STOP WASTING THAT FIREPOWER ON DEFENSE--

-- GO OUTSIDE AND BLAST IT RIGHT UP THEIR --

HEY, THERE'S A *LADY* PRESENT.

WHAT KINDA WEAPONS YOU THINKING, ROI?

I'VE GOT HOLOGRAPHIC SPECS READY, SAM.

I'LL SUPPLY THE BRAINS, YOU JUST DO THE WORK.

HOW COME I ALWAYS GET THE HEAVY LABOR?

YOU'RE THE ONE WITH A BODY, COWBOY!

SPEAKING OF -- THAT ONE'S A SIGHT TO LEAVE ON.

AN' I BELIEVE YOU KNEW ALL ALONG WHO SHE WAS?

WHO, ME?

HEY, SAM -- BIG MOMMA'S COMING IN. YOU SEE IT?

YEAH, I SAW THOSE CUTWINGS TAKE OFF--

-- ALL THE LITTLE FISH SCATTER...

...WHEN THE BIG ONE CRUISES BY.

I'M SET, ROI. FEED ME SPECS.

YOU GOT IT!

YOU KNOW-- THIS REMINDS ME OF THE TIME I GAVE IN AND WENT OUT WITH EVANS...

...ANOTHER **GRABBY** SITUATION

WE MAY BE CAUGHT, TRUE --

-- BUT I'M NOT GONNA GO QUIET!

HOO-YAH!

OUR UNEMPLOYMENT WOES ARE OVER, ROI.

THIS POWER PUTS US IN THE DEMOLITION BUSINESS!

SEE THAT? CLEAR TO THE CORE.

SAM? TELL ME I DON'T SEE A GRAPPLING HOOK. YOU'RE NOT--

DON'T WORRY, ROI -- I WON'T LEAVE YOU HANGING FOR LONG...

...I'M JUST GONNA PAY LOSER A LITTLE VISIT.

IT'S NICE TO KNOW GETTING THIS POWER HASN'T **CHANGED** YOU...YOU STILL HEAD STRAIGHT FOR TROUBLE.

WHEN YOU SEE LOSER, GIVE HIM ONE FOR ME.

MAKE IT HURT.

MY PRINCE!

OUR SENSORS SHOW NO SIGN OF DAMAGE...

...BUT WE HAVE DECOMPRESSION ON THE MAIN LEVEL!

SHOULD I ORDER THE FIGHTERS TO RETURN?

NO. I WANT TO END THIS SITUATION MYSELF.

TEN YEARS' PAY TO THE ONE WHO DELIVERS THE HUMAN TO ME!

HREEEEN

GREENK

HRMMMM

MMMMMMMM

HEY THERE, LOSER.

HERRONK

GREENK

GET HIM!

THOUGHT I'D COME DELIVER THAT WEAPON YOU WANTED... PERSONALLY!

AND YOU WILL DIE AT MY HANDS AS YOUR REWARD!

I WAS THINKIN' MORE THAT I'D DO THINGS THE OTHER WAY 'ROUND AND

RANHAP

NO!

WHERE HAS HE GONE?!

HEY!

WHAT'D I DO NOW?

YOU DIDN'T.

I DID.

GREETINGS, SAMANDAHL REY.

I THOUGHT WE SHOULD TALK.

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ZANNI!

TAK TAK

TAK TAK

PLEASE DO NOT STOP ME, ROIYA...

⇒HUFF⇐

...I MUST ESCAPE THIS SHIP!

WOULD YOU HOLD STILL AND LISTEN?

⇒HUFF⇐

THE SAURIAN PRINCE HAS US! WHEN HE DISCOVERS ME HERE --

THINK HOW I FEEL -- I'M THE SHIP HE'S CAPTURED.

MAYBE...

WHZZZZT

...BUT I'M NOT LETTING YOU INTO THE LIFEBOAT.

KLUNG

⇒HUFF⇐

BUT TCHLUSARUD'S BEEN BARGAINING WITH THE SULTAN....

...HE WILL RETURN ME TO RONOLO!

GRRRR

TAK TAK TAK

ROIYA --

SISTER --

PLEASE DON'T CONDEMN ME TO THAT LIFE AGAIN. YOU DON'T KNOW...

ZANNI, BREATHE.

EVEN IF YOU DO MAKE OPEN SPACE...

...WE'RE IN THE LEFT END OF NOWHERE.

YOU'D NEVER BE FOUND.

IT'S A BETTER CHANCE THAN I HAVE NOW. PLEASE LET ME IN.

NO, ZANNI. YOU'D JUST BE THROWING YOUR LIFE AWAY...

...AND THEN WHO'D FEED LITTLE TROUBLE?

SKRITCH SKRITCH

MPRF

YOU'RE... RIGHT.

THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY...

...I COULD...

USE THAT GUN ON THE SAURIANS?

...YES.

YES.

THE SAURIANS...

...ROIYA, IT MIGHT BE BEST IF THEY DID NOT KNOW THAT THIS SHIP HIDES SENTIENCE.

YEAH, I'D ALREADY FLASHED ON THAT. I'LL BE LURKING.

YOU BE CAREFUL.

THERE **MAY** BE ROOM FOR TWO SOULS IN THIS SHIP, BUT I'M NOT SCOOTING OVER.

SAURIAN BATTLE CRUISER MAKRUTHTE - SHUTTLE BERTH - SHUTTLE S-78.

PREPARE YOURSELF. PRINCE TCHLUSARUD IS JOINING THE BOARDING PARTY.

PRINCE TCHLUSARUD?

BUT THE HUMAN SHIP HAS NOT BEEN PROCESSED BY SECURITY...?

DO YOU WANT TO BE THE ONE TO TELL HIM *NO*?

SAMANDAHL REY IS MY SWORN ENEMY...

...I SAW HIM DISAPPEAR FROM MY OWN SHIP BEFORE MY OWN EYES...

...I'LL SEARCH HIS SHIP WITH MY OWN HANDS UNTIL I FIND OUT WHERE HE HAS GONE.

IF SAMANDAHL REY'S DISAPPEARANCE IS LINKED TO THAT STRANGE NEW WEAPON HE CONTROLS...

...I WILL FIND BOTH THE HUMAN AND THAT DEVICE IF I HAVE TO STRIP HIS SHIP TO ITS BOLTS!

THE REASON I SUMMONED YOU HERE, SAMANDAHL REY...

...IS BECAUSE YOU PRESENT SUCH AN INTERESTING ENIGMA.

DO I NOW?

Oh, YES. I CAN'T EVEN SEE YOU WITHOUT USING ACTUAL EYES.

WHICH MAKES YOU INTERESTING. JUST THAT ABILITY ALONE COULD TIP THE BALANCE OF POWER...

IS THAT A FACT.

YOU CAN STOP SEARCHING.

YOU HAVE NO WEAPONS. I PREFERRED YOU UNARMED.

AND WHY *DOES* A MAN WITH A POWER LIKE YOURS CARRY WEAPONS?

HARD T'SAY.

I SUPPOSE A MAN LIKES T'FEEL HE'S GOT AN ADVANTAGE.

MY NAME IS TRENIN.

I SAW THE AFTERMATH OF YOUR LITTLE TANTRUM DOWN ON TANIPAL...

...NOW I HAVE A DECISION TO MAKE.

SHOULD YOUR KIND BE ALLOWED TO EXIST?

OH? AND WHAT MAKES YOU THINK IT'S *YOUR* DECISION?

DUNNO HOW YOU ZAPPED ME HERE, BUT I—MPRF!

SILENCE.

I'D LIKE YOU TO LISTEN.

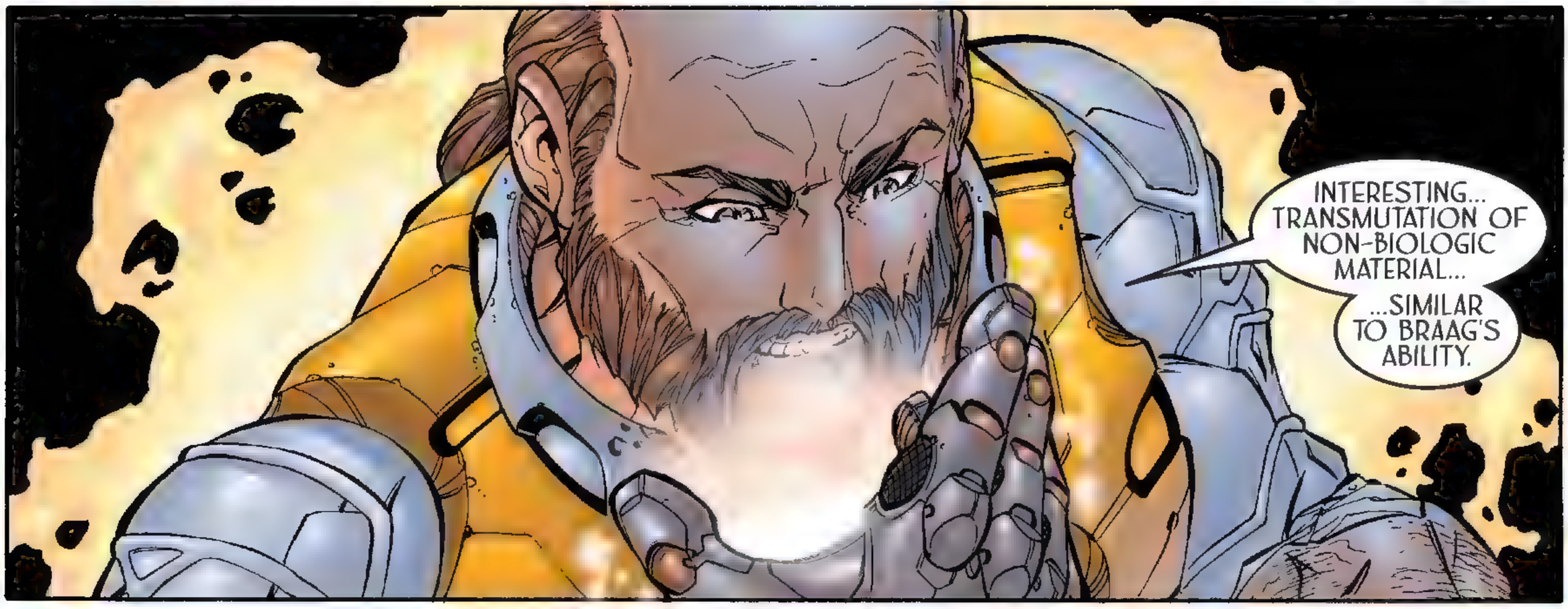
I AM OF THE *FIRST.*

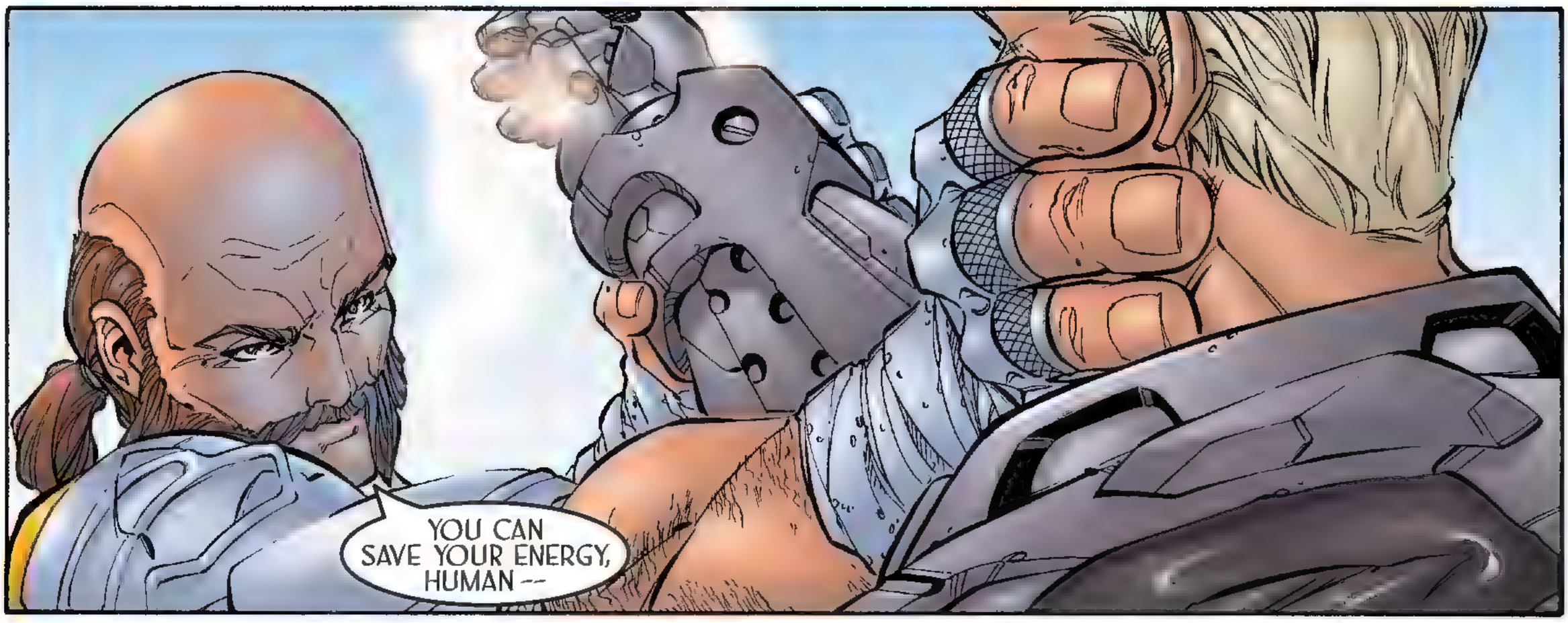
THE *CREATORS.*

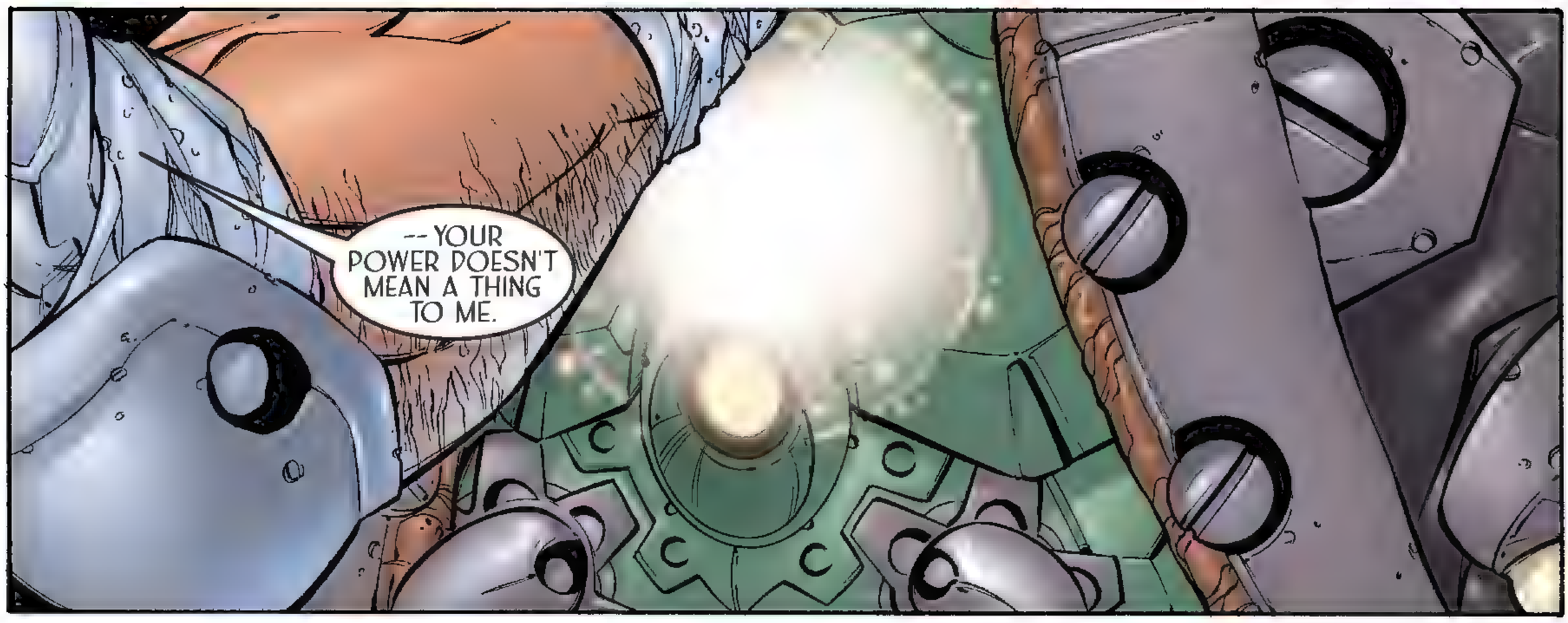
BUT YOU, YOUR SIGIL, YOU ARE NOT OUR CREATION.

WHICH MAKES YOUR KIND A TROUBLING MYSTERY.

SPLOOTCH


INTERESTING... TRANSMUTATION OF NON-BIOLOGIC MATERIAL...
...SIMILAR TO BRAAG'S ABILITY.


YOU CAN SAVE YOUR ENERGY, HUMAN --


-- YOUR POWER DOESN'T MEAN A THING TO ME.

ZOORK!

JeMERIK, I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU'D LEAD THEM AWAY FROM ME!

I THOUGHT I COULD...

YOU TWO MIGHT WANT TO MOVE..

JUST LIKE A LIZARD -- CUT A HOLE THROUGH MY SIDE WHEN THE DOOR'S NOT LOCKED..

LOOK OUT!

PARDON ME!

PFSSHT

FWOOSH

I ALSO THOUGHT THEY'D USE THE AIRLOCK.

IT'S NOT AS BAD AS IT LOOKS, ZANNI.

YOU'LL BE SAFE...

...I KEPT YOU ALIVE FOR A REASON!

SEARCH THE SHIP.

BRING ANY HUMANS YOU FIND TO ME...

...I'LL BE AT THE CONTROLS OF THIS PATHETIC PIECED-TOGETHER EXCUSE FOR A SPACECRAFT.

TCHLUSARUD HIMSELF HAS COME?

JeMERIK, YOU IDIOT, YOU KEPT ME ALIVE FOR *WHAT* REASON?

TO GET ME CAPTURED? GET YOUR REWARD?

NO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. I'M WORKING MY OWN GAME HERE.

YOU AND SAM... I SAW THE WAY YOU TWO CONNECTED.

CALL ME SENTIMENTAL, BUT I WANTED TO SEE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WHEN...

WHEN YOU GAVE ME TO SAMANDAHL REY THE WAY I WAS GIVEN TO THE SULTAN?

NO, THAT'S NOT--

NO.

THAT'S NOT.

I WILL NOT LET THAT HAPPEN.

PA CHOOM PA CHOOM

VIOLET OCULAR DISPLAY!

DON'T FIRE! THAT ONE'S A NO-KILL!

PA CHOOM PA CHOOM PA CHOOM PA CHOOM PA CHOOM

KLAK KLAK

YOU WON'T GO BACK TO THE SULTAN, ZANNI.

TRUST ME.

JeMERIK, I'M ALL OUT OF TRUST.

I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK I COULD TRUST SAM, AND WHERE IS HE NOW?

IN TROUBLE AGAIN, OF COURSE, BUT SAM SEEMS TO BE AS GOOD AT GETTING HIMSELF *OUT* OF TROUBLE AS IN...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

YOUR POWER--!

YOU ARE STEALING MY OWN!

YOU MOVE FROM ENIGMA TO THREAT, SIGIL-BEARER...

...NEXT TIME I WON'T ANNOUNCE

UNGH!

WHUMP

Oh, THIS IS SWEET. GUY ZAPS ME HERE THEN TAKES OFF HIMSELF.

WHEREVER *HERE* IS.

AN' IN THE MEANTIME, WHAT ABOUT MY SHIP'N' CREW?

WHAAK

UHF!

MY PRINCE?

WHAT HAVE I DONE?

YOU ALLOWED THE WOMAN TO BE DAMAGED.

THE SULTAN WILL BLAME ME.

THE SULTAN'S THE ONE WHO *DAMAGED* ME, NOT YOUR THUG!

SPEAK ONLY TO ANSWER ME!

NOW, WHERE *IS* HE?

WHERE IS *WHO?*

SAMANDAHL REY ESCAPED BY DISAPPEARING IN FRONT OF MY EYES...

...HOW WAS THIS ACHIEVED?

HE'S NOT... WITH YOU?

LOOKS TO ME LIKE SAM'S IN BIGGER TROUBLE AGAIN.

MY GUARDS ARE SEARCHING THIS SHIP.

THEY'LL FIND HIS HIDING PLACE...

...AND THAT WEAPON.

MEANWHILE...

HERE'S A HUMANOID.

IS THIS THE ONE WE'RE SUPPOSED TO FIND?

NO. THIS ONE'S A FEMALE.

THEY ARE MORE GLANDULAR. WHEN YOU'VE HAD MORE EXPERIENCE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE.

DO WE REPORT THIS ONE?

GRAWWWRR

NO NEED. IT'S TOO COLD.

IT'S DEAD.

THEY EAT MAMMALS...

...IT'S PROBABLY BEING STORED AS FOOD.

GRWWRR

GRAWWWWRR

PSEUDOSAUR!

IT'S *CRAZED!* I'LL ELIMINATE IT.

IT'S ONLY A PET!

SAVE YOUR AMMO FOR THE *APES*...

"...OR *US*--ONCE WE FACE THE PRINCE AND TELL HIM WE'VE FOUND *NOTHING* ABOARD."

THE ONLY LIVING BEINGS ON THIS SHIP ARE HERE IN THIS CHAMBER.

DISTURBING.

AT LEAST THE SULTAN RONOLO WILL BE PLEASED BY THE RETURN OF THE WIFE WHO BROKE CONTRACT AND FLED.

I HAVE THE *RIGHT* TO PROTECT MY OWN LIFE.

HUMAN, *YOU* ARE ANNOYING BUT NECESSARY.

THE OTHER IS NOT.

THE SULTAN WISHES HIM ELIMINATED.

THROW HIM FROM THE SHIP.

WHAT?!

BEGGING YOUR INDULGENCE, YOUR HIGHNESS, BUT YOU'RE MAKING A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

YOU SAY THE SULTAN WANTS HIM DEAD...

...BUT JeMERIK MEER IS MORE THAN HE APPEARS TO BE...

...YOU MIGHT BE SACRIFICING A VALUABLE RESOURCE, LEVERAGE TO USE AGAINST RONOLO...

...DON'T YOU WANT TO TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK IT OVER...

...BEFORE I RIP OPEN YOUR GILL SACS?

OR ARE YOU IMMUNE TO YOUR OWN POISONS?

LET HIM GO, OR I'LL CUT!

=Sigh=

I'VE FOUGHT WARRIORS WITH LESS SPIRIT...

...BUT PRAISE YOUR WARRIOR GODS THAT YOU ARE A POLITICAL NECESSITY...

...OR YOU'D *DIE* FOR THIS.

THEN *KILL* ME.

IT'S BETTER THAN GOING BACK.

NO.

BAJOUNTE-KA, AVERT YOUR EYES WHEN THE AIRLOCK OPENS TO SPACE...

...THEY'RE EVEN *UGLIER* WHEN THEY DIE.

KSSSSHT

ROIYA? HAVE A LITTLE MAGIC FOR ME?

NEVER.

LOCK ENGAGED

I CAN'T OPEN THE OUTER DOOR. THE HATCH WON'T RESPOND!

ELDER HAU, SHOULD I JUST SHOOT IT?

NO, THE SMELL MIGHT TRIGGER BLOODLUST. WE NEED A MORE HYGENIC SOLUTION.

TAKE HIM TO OUR SHUTTLE. DO IT THERE.

IT'S NOT... NECESSARY TO INFORM OUR PRINCE OF OUR... DIFFICULTY.

THANKS, ROIYA.

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU CAN FOLLOW ME OVER THERE?

TANIPAL: PLANETARY UNION EMBASSY

WE LOST *HOW* MANY SHIPS?

OKAY, *WHO* WANTS TO SUMMARIZE FOR MAIN BASE?

CROSS?

Oh, ALL RIGHT.

FOR THE RECORD. RECORDING *ON.*

BEGIN REPORT, MISTER CROSS.

HONNA INCIDENT, *FACTS:*

THE EXPLOSION LEFT NO HEAT, NO RADIATION, NO EVIDENCE EXCEPT FOR ITS SPHERE OF DESTRUCTION.

THIS UNIDENTIFIED WEAPON IS SOMEHOW LINKED TO SAMANDAHL REY, OWNER OF THE *BITTERLUCK*, WHICH LEFT TANIPAL WITH AT LEAST TWO HUMAN PASSENGERS.

REY'S SHIP IS NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF TCHLUSARUD, SO WE CAN ASSUME THAT THE SAURIANS HAVE THE WEAPON...

...ABOUT WHICH WE STILL HAVE NO USEFUL DATA.

RECORDING *OFF.*

WE CAN'T LOSE THAT WEAPON TO THE SAURS.

VINZER, DO YOU STILL HAVE SOMEONE ON TCHARUN?

THAT I DO.

I'LL SEE WHAT HE CAN FIND OUT.

OKAY, SO I'M ON A FANCY NEW SHIP.

TOO FANCY--JUST HOW D'I PLOT A COURSE WITH NO PLOTTER?

SWIPT

THIS IS ***NEW.***

HEADGEAR?

THE MAN ORDERED ME ABOARD WITH JUST A THOUGHT, SO WHY SHOULD I EXPECT THAT HIS SHIP WOULD BE...

...NORMAL?

MY SHIP TALKS TO ME NOW. YOU GONNA DO THAT?

OKAY, QUIET IT IS. YOU JUST GET ME BACK T'MY SHIP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

NOW *THAT'S* A DAMN SHAME.

FINE ENGINES LIKE YOURS...

...AND WE'RE *STILL* TOO LATE.

MADE IN TAMPRL

YOU EVER BEEN TO TCHARUN? HOTTER THAN HELL -- JUST THE WAY THOSE COLD-BLOODED LIZARDS LIKE IT.

THAT'S WHERE HE'S TAKEN THEM, SO THAT'S WHERE WE GO.

GOOD GIRL.

I'M COMIN', LOSER. LAST TIME.

YOU AND ME.

LAST TIME.

MAYBE I CAN MAKE THIS POWER OF MINE BLOW UP YOUR WHOLE STEAMING PLANET.

THAT'D END THIS WAR...

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TCHARUN: SUMMER PALACE.

YOU MUST KNOW SOMETHING!

SAMANDAHL REY HAS A WEAPON HIDDEN SOMEWHERE ON THAT SHIP.

A WEAPON CAPABLE OF CAUSING MOLECULAR DESTRUCTION WITHOUT MEASURABLE AFTER-EFFECTS.

AND YET YOU KNOW ***NOTHING*** OF HIS LOCATION, OR ***WHAT*** OR ***WHERE*** THAT ***WEAPON*** MIGHT BE!

MY TECHNICIANS ARE ALREADY SCRUTINIZING REY'S SHIP FOR ANSWERS.

UNFORTUNATELY, I CANNOT LET THEM DO THE SAME TO ***YOU.***

SO YOU WILL REMAIN IN MY... GUEST QUARTERS UNTIL I CAN ARRANGE FOR YOUR RETURN TO YOUR LOVING HUSBAND.

SO, *ZANNIATI,* THIRTEENTH BOUND WIFE TO THE SULTAN RONOLO OF TANIPAL...

...A MOST HONORED WELCOME TO THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSE...

...*TCHARUN*...

...MAY YOUR STAY HERE BE FILLED WITH TIME FOR GENTLE CONTEMPLATION OF ITS BEAUTIES.

PERHAPS YOU WILL REFLECT ON YOUR HUSBAND'S REACTION TO YOUR...

...ADVENTURE...

...WITH SAMANDAHL REY.

I'M SURE HE CANNOT WAIT TO SHOW YOU JUST HOW PLEASED HE IS WITH YOUR...

...INITIATIVE.

WHAT A CLUMSY ATTEMPT AT AN OBLIQUE HINT.

IT WAS A SAD DAY WHEN YOU LIZARDS STOPPED GRUNTING AND BEGAN SPEAKING OUR LANGUAGE.

YOU KNOW RONOLO LIKES TO INFLICT PAIN, TCHLUSARUD.

HE SIMPLY DOES IT WITH BLOWS, NOT INNUENDO.

RRRRAGAIN, YOUR STATUS SAVES YOU FROM YOURSELF.

FOR YOUR SAFETY, ALSO, A SMALL DEMONSTRATION OF OUR SECURITY SYSTEM...

...GUARD?...

...USING A SMALL MAMMAL LIKE YOURSELF.

CLNNNK

CHEE!

CHEE! CHEE!

A GOOD HOST MAKES HIS GUEST AWARE OF ALL POTENTIAL DANGERS.

IN CASE YOU WERE ENTERTAINING THOUGHTS OF... WANDERING...

CHEE! CHEE!

"...KNOW THAT IT WILL COME WITH A PRICE.

SPLOOSH

"THAT PRICE IS PAIN AND PROBABLE DEATH."

SHOULD YOU NEED ANYTHING TO MAKE YOUR WAIT HERE MORE COMFORTABLE, ***HONORED*** ZANNIATI, MY GUARDS WILL PROVIDE.

T'CHARUNE SUMMER PALACE, NEWPORT

THEY'RE ALL GONE, ELDER HAU.

FINALLY.

WE MAY HAVE BEEN CURSED WITH ***MECHANICAL SETBACKS*** UP TO THIS POINT, BUT NOW OUR TASK CAN BE COMPLETED...

...DISCREETLY.

RELEASE THE HUMAN.

VRRRRT

PERHAPS WE CAN ACTUALLY KILL IT THIS TIME.

ELDER HAU--

WHERE IS IT?

LOOKING FOR *ME?*

IT'S AMAZING HOW THINGS GO WRONG FOR YOU TWO.

AIRLOCKS THAT WON'T OPEN, WEAPONS THAT HOLD NO CHARGE...

KRAWK

KRAK

IT'S ALMOST AS IF YOU WEREN'T MEANT TO KILL ME...

...ALTHOUGH I DON'T THINK TCHLUSARUD WOULD WELCOME THAT EXPLANATION.

SORRY I CAN'T OFFER YOU...

...A BETTER ONE!

NO, BAJOUNTE-KA!

DON'T BOTHER WITH THE APE...

"...THOSE ARE DANGEROUS WATERS..."

SPLOOSH

"....HE'S DONE FOR."

NOW THAT WAS A RIDE.

I'D TRADE MY SHIP FOR *YOU* IN A HEART-BEAT...

...'CEPT THAT MY SHIP'S GOT MY BEST FRIEND'S SOUL INSIDA IT.

YOU'RE TRULY A WONDER, WHICH MEANS YOU'VE *GOT* TO HAVE A COMMLINK SOMEWHERES.

CARE TO SHOW ME?

AND I SUPPOSE I DON'T HAVE T'TELL YOU WHO I INTEND TO CONTACT?

ROIYA?

C'N YOU HEAR ME?

SAM? YOU'RE LINKING ON A STRANGE CODE, SOLDIER.

WHERE ARE YOU?

LISTEN --

--YOU WILL **NOT** BELIEVE THIS --

-- I WAS ZAPPED T'ANOTHER SHIP BY A GUY WITH POWERS KINDA LIKE MINE!

OH, GREAT.

THERE'S **TWO** OF YOU?

GRWWR?

TELL YOUR FRIEND HIS **TIMING** NEEDS WORK...

...YOU LEFT US IN A VULNERABLE POSITION.

SAM?

ROIYA?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING THERE?

I'VE JUST BEEN HANGING AROUND THE SAURIAN ORBITOWER, SAM.

THINK MAYBE YOU AND YOUR **TWIN** COULD COME RESCUE ME?

NO, I MEAN I CAN REALLY ***SEE*** YOU...

...AND YOU'RE JUST LIKE I REMEMBER!

TCHA! YOU SEE THE PSEUDOSAUR IN THE COMM FIELD.

WAIT, ROI -- LOOK AROUND!

THIS SHIP -- IT'S LOADED!

SO, I'M ABOUT TO SKRAG LOSER WHEN THERE'S THIS GIANT WHO SAYS HE'S GOTTA DECIDE *"WHAT TO DO ABOUT ME"*...

THEN SOMETHIN' BIG HAPPENS WITH MY POWER, SORTA LIKE ON TANIPAL...

...AN' I'M FEELIN' ALL POWERFUL--AND THE OTHER GUY JUST ***DISAPPEARS,*** LEAVING ME WITH THIS GREAT SHIP.

STATE OF THE ART, ROI, WITH A SET OF MENTAL CONTROLS AND A HOLOGRAM SYSTEM YOU'D...

...DIE FOR.

DISAPPEARS?

DON'T YOU THINK HE'LL BE BACK SOON?

YOU BETTER COME GET ME AND LOSE THAT SHIP BEFORE HE DOES COME BACK!

THAT SHIP'S GOT WEAPONS, RIGHT?

YOU POWER IN, LET ME LOOSE, THEN COMMANDEER A SAURIAN VESSEL WITH A CARGO BAY BIG ENOUGH TO FIT ME...

ROI, I'M TALKIN' TO YOU LIKE YOU'RE STILL... AROUND.

YOU CAN'T SEE THIS AT ALL, CAN YOU?

YOU'RE NOT REALLY HERE...

...THE SHIP MADE IT UP. FROM MY HEAD IT MADE YOU UP

SAM, IF THAT SHIP'S ALL YOU SAY, SEE IF IT'S GOT SOME KIND OF SECURITY BAFFLE.

MAYBE IT COULD SNEAK YOU IN INSTEAD OF YOU HAVING TO CHARGE IN SOLDIER-STYLE...

I'VE GOT TO POWER DOWN. YOU'RE GOING TO VOICE-ONLY.

HOW'S OUR OTHER NEW CREW? I DON'T SEE THEM...

LOSER'S GOT ZANNIATI, SAM...

...AND I'M NOT SURE IF JeMERIK'S STILL ALIVE.

BUT THAT'S NOT MY WORRY RIGHT NOW...

...EXCUSE ME FOR BEING A LITTLE SELF-ABSORBED...

...BUT I'M CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING THE DOWNSIDE OF BEING A MECHANICAL OBJECT...

...AND I SURE COULD USE YOUR COMPANY....

...SOON....

...BEFORE THEY FINISH TAKING ME APART.

TCHARUN: SHOPPING DISTRICT

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"THAT'S COST PER KILO...

...WE CAN ALSO PREPARE PACKAGES IN BULK, WITH AN APPROPRIATE DISCOUNT.

JAYO-SEEHEY-KA, THIS WAS JUST DELIVERED...

EXCUSE ME, PLEASE...

...THIS IS PRIVATE.

FAMILY MATTERS...

FAMILY OF *MAN*.

VRTTT JUST A HEADS UP, J.O. -- THE SULTAN'S MISSING WIFE IS ON HER WAY TO TCHARUN.

HOLO FILE ATTACHED.

*THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SAURIANS AND THE SULTAN WOULD BE **DAMAGED** IF ANYTHING **UNFORTUNATE** HAPPENED TO THE WOMAN...*

*..THOUGHT **YOU** SHOULD BE WARNED THAT RONOLO WOULD BLAME THE SAURIANS IF **TRAGEDY** STRUCK.*

I GET THE MESSAGE.

HAS THE SULTAN BEEN INFORMED THAT WE HAVE HIS MISSING PROPERTY?

YES, SECOND INHERITOR. SULTAN RONOLO IS SENDING A SHIP TO RETRIEVE THE WOMAN.

NO, I WILL SPEAK. THE BLAME IS MINE.

HONORED TCHLUSARUD!

WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT WE INITIALLY FAILED TO KILL THE HUMAN MALE.

THERE WERE EQUIPMENT ***MALFUNCTIONS***... WE DID NOT WISH TO ***BURDEN*** YOU...

THE HUMAN IS VERY HARD TO KILL.

IT ESCAPED A SECOND TIME, BUT--

WHAT?!

*YOU MISERABLE FAILURES LET IT **ESCAPE** ON TCHARUN?*

JeMERIK'S ALIVE...

BUT--

GLUGK!

YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU TWO COULD NOT MANAGE TO KILL A SINGLE HUMAN!?

LET ME SHOW YOU HOW EASY IT IS TO KILL!
GYAAH
GYA
GLRGL
GLGGL

HONORED ELDER! THE HUMAN!

WE BELIEVE IT IS NOW DEAD, AS IT DOVE INTO THE WATERS WHERE THE *SENTINEL* DWELLS!

THERE WAS *TURBULENCE*...

WE FAILED TO FOLLOW YOUR DIRECT ORDERS, HONORED TCHLUSARUD...

...BUT WE DID ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE!

MY MOST HUMBLE APOLOGY FOR OUR UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR!

TO WHICH MY IMPATIENT RESPONSE HAS NOW CAUSED A WASTE OF GOOD EXPERIENCE...

=SIGH= I MUST WORK MORE WITH THE WEAPONSMASTER.

THESE CONTINUING LOSSES OF CONTROL ARE... UNACCEPTABLE.

POOR JeMERIK, POOR ROIYA...

Oh, SAM...

...WHERE ARE YOU?

SO, HOW'S 'BOUT IT?

D'YOU HAVE SOME KINDA CODEBREAKER SET...

...SOMETHIN' THAT'LL SLIP US PAST THE SAURIAN GUARDPOST?

ROI--?!

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING...

WHOOYA!

LOOKIT THIS!

YOU KNOW HOW WE'RE GONNA GET PAST THE SAURIANS?

WE ARE ONE!

YOU'RE GONNA HAFTA SEE IT T'BELIEVE, BUT THIS SHIP CHANGED SHAPE, AND I *FELT* HOW IT WORKS!

IT'S AMAZING -- IT'S GOT MY POWER, BUT... *SLICKER!*

MAYBE SOMEDAY...

DON'T GET TOO ATTACHED, SAM.

UNLESS YOU'RE PLANNING TO ABANDON ME FOR YOUR NEW WONDER SHIP.

WELL, NOW...

"...MOOT POINT IF I DON'T PASS THEIR SECURITY CHECK."

YOU ARE ENTERING ORBITOWER SECURED SPACE. STAND BY FOR CLEARANCE...

...SHUTTLE T-ZERO-THREE CLEARED FOR BERTH SEVEN-FOUR.

SO FAR, SO GOOD...

I'M DOCKED, ROI...

...SEE YOU SOON.

KFFFSSSHH

WHA--?

AN APE? HERE?

I'M NOT AN APE, I AM A *MAN!*

HUMAN!

GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT, YOU STUPID LIZARD!

INTRUDER?!

CALL ALERT!

SAM, LEAVE THE LIZARD AND LISTEN.

SEE THE AIRLOCK CONTROLS? USE YOUR POWER TO TETHER YOURSELF, AND BLOW THE SAURIANS OUT OF HERE.

NOW THERE'S A PLAN...

...HERE GOES...

GO!

WHOOSH

SORRY, SAM, BUT I'M STILL STUCK. THERE'S A GRAPPLE ASSEMBLY...

GOTCHA, ROI.

I'M ON MY WAY.

AFTER I BREAK THE GRAPPLE, YOU GET OUT OF HERE AND HIDE.

THE DARK MOON-- KEEP TO ITS FAR SIDE AND WE'LL RENDEZVOUS THERE ONCE I GRAB MY SHIP AND--

SAM?

WERE YOU PLANNING TO GO GET ZANNIATI?

AFTER I GET *YOU* FREE AND FULLY REPAIRED, THEN I'LL--

DO IT FIRST.

ZANNI HELPED US OUT AND NOW SHE'S IN TROUBLE. I CAN'T GET AROUND THAT.

YOU'VE GOT THAT HOT SHIP...

...I'LL WAIT.

NOW, ROI...

...YOU TRYIN' TO PLAY HERO ON ME?

WHO'S THE ONE WITH THE POWERS HERE? SEEMS TO ME HERO'S **YOUR** JOB.

SEE YA, SOLDIER.

BRACE FOR VACUUM...

TCHARUN, THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD: BLADE ARENA.

SO, PRINCE TCHLUSARUD...

...YOUR ELDER HAS SENT YOU BACK TO MY TRAINING RING?

I MADE MY OWN DETERMINATION TO COME.

THE HUMAN, SAMANDAHL REY, HAS--

EXCUSES!

THE *HUMAN.*

YOU LET A HUMAN DRIVE OUT DECADES OF TRAINING?

I TRAINED YOU.

DID I TRAIN YOU TO BE WEAK?

TAKE YOUR BLADE AND SHOW ME YOU HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN YOUR LESSONS!

I AM THE SON OF THE LIVING RULER, WEAPONSMASTER...

...YOU WILL NOT SPEAK TO ME LIKE A FIRST-YEAR.

WHY NOT? YOU'RE AS UNDISCIPLINED AS ONE.

TAKE OPPOSITION STANCE...

AND ATTACK.

GRAANRR!

THIS CHILDISH VENDETTA OF YOURS HAS DRIVEN THE PERFECT FORMS FROM YOUR THINKING!

I KNOW THE FORMS...

SLOPPY.

FOCUS.

PATIENCE.

AND CONTROL.

I CAME TO YOU FOR GUIDANCE, NOT DERISION!

EARN IT.

FOCUS.

PATIENCE.

THIS ANNOYS ME, TCHLUSARUD.

YOU ARE AN ASTOUNDING WARRIOR, ONE OF MY BEST.

I SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DISRUPT YOUR CONCENTRATION SO EASILY.

WE MUST WORK ON THAT.

GET UP.

CONTROL.

BREAK

RETRIEVE YOUR WEAPON.

AND *LISTEN.*

YOU MUST ASPIRE TO PERFECT FORMS.

QUELL THE ANIMAL WITHIN BY ***MASTERING*** ITS PASSIONS.

TAKE THAT WILD ENERGY FROM THE CORE OF YOUR BEING...

...THEN ***STRIKE,*** UNLEASHING ITS FURY IN A PERFECTED MOTION.

THAT IS YOUR STRENGTH.

THAT WILL BRING DOWN ANY HUMAN.

NOW, MIRROR ME AS SO...

...AND SO...

...AND SO.

FOCUS, PATIENCE, AND CONTROL.

WITHOUT THE FORMS, WE ARE ONLY MINDLESS CREATURES.

NOW, HOLD THAT POSITION UNTIL I RELEASE YOU.

COME, STUDENTS. LEAVE THE PRINCE TO HIS LESSON.

STILL IN CONTROL?

YOUR TRAINING DOES COME BACK TO YOU. EXCELLENT FORM, TCHLUSARUD.

YOU MAY REST.

=HAAH!=

I'VE KNOWN YOU SINCE YOU WERE SMALL, TCHLUSARUD. I KNOW YOUR STRENGTH OF WILL...

...A SPIRIT AS GREAT AS YOURS CAN ONLY RESPECT TRUE CHALLENGES.

BY MASTERING THIS ONE, YOU HAVE REGAINED A SENSE OF YOUR OWN UNBREAKABLE WILL.

WHY DID YOU FORCE THIS PUNISHMENT ON ME?

YOUR SOUL KNOWS THE FORMS THAT YOUR MIND WAS IGNORING.

NOW GO TO THE BATHS AND REST.

NO.

NO REST.

I HAVE ONLY DISPLAYED THE FORMS...

...NOT MASTERED THEM.

I MUST BE PREPARED...

...I HAVE AN ENEMY TO HUNT.

HNNN...

THEN LET'S BEGIN.

TAKE PREPARATION STANCE...

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T'CHARUN: SAURIAN ORBITOWER.

SAM? TELL ME YOU'RE GETTING OUT OF THERE.

I'M NOT LEAVING YOU TO DIE.

ROIYA, I'M GONNA BE FINE.

JUST MAKIN' SURE I STICK AROUND.

YOU GET YOURSELF OUTTA HERE.

YEAH, FINE. I WAIT BEHIND THE FAR MOON WHILE YOU HAVE ALL THE FUN.

POOR LI'L ROIYA.

YOU GONNA BE OKAY OUT THERE?

YOU GONNA BE OKAY IN THERE?

Oh, YEAH...

JUST WHIPPIN' UP A LITTLE HELMET SO'S I CAN KEEP BREATHIN' OFF MY ARMOR'S OX SUPPLY...

...AN' GETTIN' READY TO SURPRISE SOME SAURIANS WHO THINK THEY'RE DEALING WITH JUST ANOTHER GRUNT.

CAREFUL, SAM. DON'T LET THEM CATCH YOU WITH YOUR GUARD DOWN BECAUSE YOU'RE BUSY PATTING YOUR OWN EGO.

WHY, ROI -- I DO BELIEVE --

-- YOU'VE GOT ME CONFUSED --

-- WITH LOSER!

Uh...oh.

SAM?!

KRAK!

SAM! ANSWER ME!

NO AIR! =UUH!= I GOT NO AIR! =UUH!= I GOT --

HEY.

WHAT I GOT IS NO PROBLEM WITH THAT.

HOW 'BOUT THAT.

THINGS ARE ON THEIR WAY TO *REALLY* INTERESTING.

THEY BROKE MY HELMET. DETAILS LATER, ROI --

SAM?

YOU SOUND FUNNY, SOLDIER. WHAT'S GOING ON?

"-- RIGHT THIS MINUTE I GOT ME A FIGHT T'FINISH..."

...AN' IT'S A WHOLE NEW GAME NOW.

BROKE YOUR--? YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU'RE STANDING IN VACUUM WITH NO HEADGEAR?

THAT, OR I'M DEAD AN' DREAMIN'.

BUT THIS DREAM'S GOT SAUR GUARDS INSTEADA YOU IN IT...

...SO I SUSPECT I'M AWAKE.

NOT GOOD.

BACK-UPS?

NOPE, BIGGER PROBLEM...

...SAURIAN SECURITY SHIP.

TWO-PHASE PLASMA CANNONS... GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE, SAM. THEY'LL FRY THEIR OWN TO GET YOU.

THAT THOUGHT HAD CROSSED MY MIND.

Oh, YEAH -- IT'S ALWAYS YOUR IDEA.

F'COURSE!

WHAT A SORRY BUNCHA TUMBLEDOWN TROOPERS!

BUT WHEN THEY REPORT THIS TO THEIR BOSS, THEY BETTER MAKE ME LOOK GOOD...

"...I WANNA SCARE THE PANTS OFFA LOSER."

HE HATES ME ALREADY-- IMAGINE WHEN HE SEES WHAT I CAN DO NOW.

INCIDENTALLY, ROIYA, I AM CURRENTLY HOLDING BACK A CANNON BLAST WITH MY ***HANDS***.

*BASED ON WHAT YOU'VE DONE LATELY, I CAN'T EVEN **ACT** SURPRISED.*

Oh, YES, I AM ***GOOD***, AM I NOT?

YOU'RE SAFE, I'M STILL ALIVE, AND THIS MISSION IS ON ITS WAY TO COMPLETED...

BUT I TELL YA, ROI -- MAKIN' THINGS MOVE, NOT NEEDIN' AIR TO BREATHE -- IT'S ALL SOMETHING THAT NEEDS THINKING ABOUT.

MEANING?

I JUST KEEP THINKIN' THAT WHOEVER PLANTED THIS THING ON ME'S GONNA SHOW UP AND TAKE IT BACK.

AFTER ALL, WHO'D GIVE A TIRED-OUT SOLDIER A WEAPON LIKE THIS ON PURPOSE?

SOMEBODY WITH A GOOD EYE FOR POTENTIAL.

OR TWO BLIND ONES.

GO AHEAD AND LAUGH, ROI -- I'LL FIND A WAY TO GET YOU BACK BREATHIN' SOMEDAY...

...JUST SO'S I CAN KICK YOUR BUTT.

WHY?

WHY'S IT ALL *SO?*

WHY *ME?*

I AM CERTAIN YOU WILL BE COMFORTABLE UNTIL MY RETURN, HONORED ZANNIATI.

I REGRET THAT YOU HAD TO WITNESS MY UNFORTUNATE DISPLAY OF PUNISHMENT.

BUT I TRUST THAT YOU FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT MIGHT BEFALL YOU SHOULD YOU TRY TO LEAVE THIS ESTATE.

YOU TWO! YOU WILL ACCOMPANY ME TO THE WEAPONSMASTER.

WE'RE UNITED IN MORE THAN YOU KNOW, *LOSER*...

...WE *BOTH* KNOW YOUR SECRETS.

WHREEEEEEEEEEEEN

YOUR SUBTLE DEMONSTRATION MADE IT *CLEAR* I'D BE EATEN ALIVE BY DEMON FISH, TCHLUSARUD.

SO WE ARE UNITED IN UNDERSTANDING AND I MAY TAKE MY LEAVE.

I'M MAKING YOU TWO NERVOUS, AREN'T I?

WHREEEEN

YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO FOLLOW ME INTO THESE WATERS.

YOU CAN RELAX.

I WOULDN'T WANT TO SPOIL THE SULTAN'S REVENGE ON ME THAT WAY.

SPLOOSH

I'LL FIND SOME OTHER WAY TO ESCAPE.

EH?

WHAT WAS *THAT!*

ZANN!!

WAAHOOO!

CARE FOR A RIDE?

NOT YOU LIZARDS -- JUST THE GIRL.

JeMERIK?

DIVE IN!

THIS SWEETHEART'S SCARED THE CARNIVORES AWAY!

C'MON -- IT'S SAFE!

I KNOW, I KNOW --

TRUST YOU.

NO!

I HATE THIS JOB.

SPLOOSH

GOTCHA, PRETTY LADY!

SO, JUST WHERE IS THIS WILD RIDE GOING?

SAURIAN SPACEPORT. WE'LL STEAL THE SHIP WE FLEW IN ON.

BUT YOU WEREN'T WITH ME...

YES, I WAS. I RODE INSIDE THE BAGGAGE COMPARTMENT.

I WANT A WINDOW SEAT THIS TRIP.

NOW THERE'S SOMETHING YOU *DON'T* SEE.

I KINDA LIKE YOU TWO.

TOO BAD YOU'RE NOTHING BUT FRESH MEAT FOR THE BUTCHER SHOP.

TCHARUN: SUMMER PALACE SKYPORT

ROI, YOU SAY THIS PLACE IS IT?

WHY WOULD THEY BE WILLING T'TELL YOU WHERE ZANNI WAS EXACTLY?

THEY DIDN'T.

I'VE BEEN EAVESDROPPING ON THE SULTAN'S COMM CHANNELS.

PRETTY EASY CODE TO BREAK.

CODE-BREAKIN' NOW?

WATCH YOURSELF, ROI.

I'VE GOT PRIVATE FILES STASHED IN THAT SHIP.

YOU STAY OUTTA 'EM.

TOO LATE.

I STILL SAY THE ELEVATOR WOULD HAVE BEEN FASTER AND EASIER.

THIS IS SAFER.

ELECTRONICS HAVE A WAY OF BETRAYING YOUR POSITION.

JeMERIK, WHERE WERE YOU RAISED THAT THEY HAD NO SECURITY CONCERNS?

A LONG WAY FROM HERE.

C'MON UP.

I GOT VISITORS, ROI --

-- GOTTA CLEAR 'EM OFF.

ZANNI!

AAAH!

WHOOPS!

AIEEEEE!

SAM...?

YOU'RE ALIVE...

ZANNIATI!

I'M S'SORRY. DIDN'T EXPECT T'FIND YOU HERE!

DIDN'T EXPECT I'D FIND *BOTHA* YOU!

GOOD T'SEE YA MADE IT, MEER.

NICE SAVE.

DOES THIS MEAN YOU'RE HERE TO REUNITE US WITH THE LOVELY ROIYA?

IN A SHORT WHILE. I'VE GOT ME SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS WITH A CERTAIN SAURIAN PRINCE.

YOU TWO HOP INTO MY SHUTTLE HERE --

-- NEVER MIND ITS SHAPE --

-- AND I'LL BE BACK WITH YOU IN A HEARTBEAT.

SAM, IS THIS JUST FOR REVENGE?

WHAT GOOD WILL IT DO... ROIYA IF YOU...?

I'LL BE BACK, ZANNI.

THAT'S A PROMISE.

JUST GIVE ME AN HOUR TO FIND LOSER, WILLYA?

I... KNOW WHERE YOU SHOULD LOOK.

I HEARD HIM SAY HE WAS GOING TO SEE THE WEAPONSMASTER.

DOES THAT HELP?

THAT TELLS ME *EXACTLY* WHERE TO FIND HIM.

THE BLADE ARENA.

THIS WON'T TAKE LONG AT ALL.

YOU KNOW, I DOVE IN AMONG FLESH-EATING CREATURES TO SAVE YOU AND I DIDN'T GET A LOOK LIKE THAT.

Uh -- I'M SORRY, JeMERIK, WHAT DID YOU SAY?

YOU'RE NOT TAKING ME FOR GRANTED, ARE YOU --

TZING

ZANN!

DON'T MOVE!

TAK

TAK

TAK

WE'RE BEING SHOT AT! HE'S TRYING TO KILL YOU!

YOU SOUND STRANGELY *HAPPY* ABOUT THAT.

YES! *NO!* I JUST LIKE THE WAY IT MAKES ME FEEL...

...ALIVE!

HMPF.

DAMN FOOLS JUMPED?

IDIOTS -- THERE'S SOME WICKED BEASTS BELOW.

LIKE *US?*

QUICK QUESTION: WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL US?

JUST THE WOMAN. IT MAKES THE SAURS LOOK BAD TO THE SULTAN IF SHE DOESN'T MAKE IT.

IT'S YOUR CALL, ZANNI. YOUR LIFE WAS THREATENED. DO I LET GO?

NO, DON'T.

LET'S JUST WRAP HIM UP AND LEAVE HIM FOR THE SAURIANS TO DISCOVER.

YOU CAN AFFORD TO BE MERCIFUL.

AFTER ALL, ***YOU*** WERE NEVER IN ANY DANGER, WERE YOU?

TCHARUN: BLADE ARENA.

WEAPONSMASTER!

TEACHER! WE MUST SPEAK!

HOLD POSITION.

AN UNWELCOME OUTBURST, PRINCE TCHLUSARUD.

ITS CAUSE?

I AM... DISAPPOINTED WITH MY BEHAVIOR.

THE FORMS HAVE BETRAYED ME.

SO...

YOU DIDN'T GET THE HUMAN AND YOU WERE SHAMED.

THE FORMS ARE NOT YOUR BETRAYER, TCHLUSARUD.

IT IS YOUR ANIMAL SELF THAT MUST BE CONTROLLED.

REVIEW THE FORMS.

BEGIN WITH *FOCUS.*

BREATHE...

...RELAX YOUR STANCE...

...SHIFT YOUR WEIGHT FROM THE TALONS ONTO THE FOOTMASS...

PATIENCE.

CLOSE YOUR EYES...

...ENVISION YOUR TARGET...

BLADE ARENA.

GOT MEMORIES OF THIS PLACE THAT AREN'T GOOD ONES, LOSER.

IT'S BEEN QUITE A FEW YEARS.

BUT THIS TIME --

-- YOU'RE NOT --

-- GETTING --

--AWAY!

KRAWHOOM

CONTROL.

HEY, LOSER!

READY FOR ROUND TWO?

REPEAT AFTER ME:

FOCUS, PATIENCE, CONTROL.

BUT I MUST--

YOU MUST *NOT.*

YOU MUST STAND AND OBSERVE...

...WHILE I ELIMINATE THE IMPEDIMENT TO YOUR TRAINING.

REMEMBER, WE ARE FASTER...

KRANGK

...STRONGER...

...AND MORE MERCIFUL THAN THE APES.

WHOA! THAT'S NO MERCY I KNOW!

WHAT SAY I *SHOW* YOU WHAT KINDA TRICKS THIS APE CAN PULL OUTTA HIS FURRY BUTT!

AN' THEN YOU CAN JUST *SUCK* ON *MY* KINDA MERCY.

GAUCH!

TEACHER'S DOWN.

YOU'RE NEXT, LOSER.

I SHOULD HAVE KILLED YOU WHEN YOU WERE LAST HERE!

MY MISTAKE THEN WAS INEXPERIENCE--

--IMPERFECT CONTROL!

NEVER AGAIN, *HUMAN!* YOUR BLOOD WILL FILL THIS RING!

YOU NEVER HAD A PRAYER, LOSER.

NOT TEN YEARS BACK, AN' ESPECIALLY NOT *NOW.*

COME AN' GET ME...

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TCHARUN: BLADE ARENA.

'BOUT TIME YOU'N'ME HAD IT OUT, LOSER.

HRAEEEEK!

LOSIN' LANGUAGE ON ME? GOIN' PRIMAL?

YOU... ...WILL DIE TODAY!

GOT THAT WRONG, LOSER...

...TODAY'S YOUR PAYBACK FOR WHAT YOU DID TO MY SQUAD.

WHICH IS LESS THAN THE HARM YOU'VE DONE *ME*, SAMANDAHL REY!

YOU MOURN *FIVE* LIVES...

...AND YET *YOU* DESTROYED THE *JAHKEMRAH* AND HER ENTIRE CREW!

YOU CAUSED THE SLAUGHTER ON TANIPAL!

...AND NOW **YOU** HAVE KILLED THE WEAPONSMASTER!

I'LL JUST WAIT FOR THE BODY TO COOL TO COUNT YOUR MENTOR ON MY LIST, TCHLUSARUD--

--YOU LIZARDS ARE WICKED TOUGH TO KILL.

HRRRRRR

DO WE JOIN?

NO! CAUSE NO SHAME!

OUR LAST ORDER WAS TO HOLD!

BUT I GOT A LITTLE BIO UPDATE FOR YOUR SAM REY FILE--

--SO AM I!

YOU CAN TOSS WHATEVER KINDA ATTACK YOU LIKE AT ME!

I CAN FIX ANY DAMAGE FASTER'N YOU CAN FLING IT!

TCHARUN: SUMMER PALACE, SKYPORT.

I DON'T FEEL RIGHT ABOUT THIS.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I CAN'T STAND JUST WAITING FOR SAM TO COME BACK, JeMERIK!

THIS SHIP HAS ENOUGH SPECIALIZED TECH, IT'S GOT TO HAVE A CACHE OF PERSONAL ARMAMENTS.

IF WE CAN FIND SOME WEAPONRY, WE CAN MAKE SURE SAM GETS AWAY SAFELY.

YOU'RE RIGHT, ZANNI. IT *HAS* TO HAVE WEAPONS...

...LIKE THESE?

I THOUGHT I LOOKED THERE...

YOU JUST DIDN'T HAVE THE RIGHT TOUCH.

NOT *YOUR* TOUCH, ANYWAY. LET'S LOAD UP AND FIND SAM...

TELL YOU, LOSER--I AM PURELY ENJOYING THIS DANCE...

...MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A KID AGAIN!

KRAEENK

THE FORMS, TCHLUSARUD.

REMEMBER THE FORMS...

WEAPONSMASTER!

YES, TEACHER.

I PRAISE KHYALHTUA YOU LIVE.

THE FORMS...

FOCUS...

PATIENCE!

CONTROL.

OKAY, NOW. NO *COACHING*--

YOU SAURS JUST WON'T DIE EASY, WILLYA?

WHAT SAY I UP THE ANTE?

NOT GONNA STOP 'TIL YOU TWO DO, LOSER.

HRAEENK

I'M GONNA RAIN THE WHOLE PLACE DOWN ON YOUR BODIES --

-- BURY YOU IN THE SAME SPOT WHERE MY SQUAD FELL!

HRAEENK

YES, IT *DOES* LOOK LIKE SAM *REALLY* NEEDED *OUR* HELP!

JeMERIK, THIS IS NOT A GAME!

I KNOW THAT.

THEN *ACT* LIKE IT, PLEASE!

PA CHOOM PA CHOOM PA CHOOM PA CHOOM PA CHOOM

ZANNI?

NO! YOU STAY OUTTA THIS!

YOU TWO ARE ALLIES?

GOOD SHOT!

THAT PLASMA BALL *SHOULD* HAVE TAKEN MY HAND OFF, I ASSUME?

YOU'RE SLOW...INJURED... HARDLY WORTH KILLING...

...BUT I'LL DO IT. TELL YOUR LEADER TO BACK AWAY FROM SAM.

BEING INJURED...ONLY BRINGS ME DOWN TO YOUR LEVEL... HUMAN!

AAAH!

WHACK

TCHLUSARUD!

CLAIM ADVANTAGE!

END THIS!

NNG!

A CHOICE, SAMANDAHL REY!

LAY DOWN YOUR NECK TO ME OR WATCH ZANNIATI DIE!

THINK, LOSER.

YOU CAME CHASIN' ME, LOOKIN' FOR A WEAPON...

...WHEN'S IT GONNA BE CLEAR TO YOU--

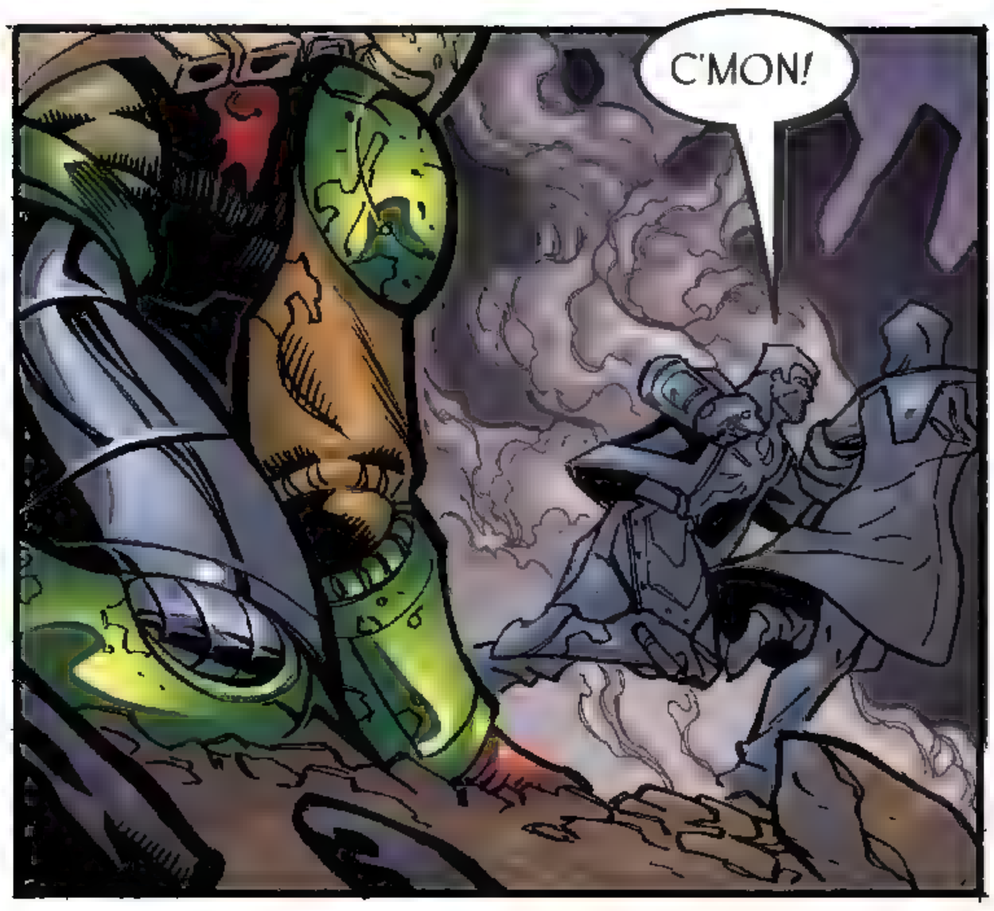
--IT'S ME!

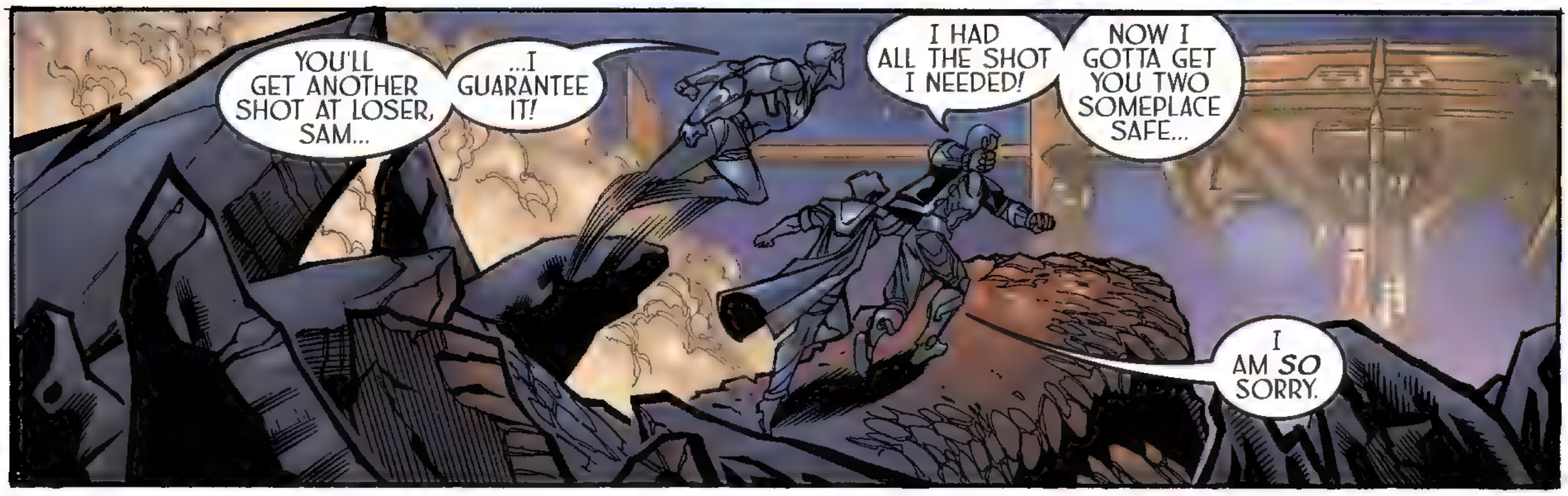
YAAHOOO!

GHAUUURK!
THANK YOU, SAMANDAHL REY.

THANK ME AFTER WE'RE OUTTA HERE!
AN' CALL ME SAM.

WHY'D YOU TWO GET IN THE WAY?
I HAD IT ALL UNDER CONTROL UNTIL YOU...
I HAD HIM!
I'M SORRY... SAM. IT'S MY FAULT.


C'MON!


YOU'LL GET ANOTHER SHOT AT LOSER, SAM...
...I GUARANTEE IT!
I HAD ALL THE SHOT I NEEDED!
NOW I GOTTA GET YOU TWO SOMEPLACE SAFE...
I AM *SO* SORRY.

IT SLIPPED MY MIND THAT YOU'RE A *GOD* NOW!

DON'T BE ANGRY, ZANNI.

IT'S JUST--

--YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH ME AN' THAT SAURIAN...

...THERE'S A LOT OF GHOSTS IN THAT ARENA.

THEN FORGIVE ME FOR INTRUDING ON THEIR REST.

AND, SAM? WHERE'S THE CRASH SEATS? HOW DO WE STRAP IN?

NO NEED!

WE'RE ALREADY IN SPACE? WHEN DID THE SAURIANS GET THIS KIND OF TECHNOLOGY?

AND WHERE'S ROIYA?

THEY DIDN'T. IT'S NOT SAURIAN. THIS SHIP'S A LITTLE PRESENT FROM HEAVEN.

HEY, ROI, YOU STILL HANGIN' IN THERE?

WE'RE ON OUR WAY.

GET A MEDICIAN IN HERE NOW!

AND GET ME A COMMLINK TO THE ORBITOWER!

CONTROL, TCHLUSARUD.

WE ARE NOT ANIMALS.

HI, SAM.

YOU KICK LOSER'S BUTT?

ROIYA!

WHA--?

NOT SO COMPLETELY AS I'D LIKE. HAD A LITTLE INTERRUPTION...

SPEW THE FORMS!

I NO LONGER NEED MY REVENGE IN PERSON.

I JUST WANT HIM DEAD AND HIS SHIP DESTROYED!

PLEASE BE SPARE SUITS... YES!

SHAPELESS, OVERSIZED, BAD COLOR...

...BUT *ANYTHING* WOULD FEEL MORE... *NORMAL.*

LESS LIKE A TOY.

SAFER. MORE ARMOR THAN FLUFF.

OH!

Hmmm. ARMOR IT IS!

HEY-- uh...

...WHERE'D YOU GET *THAT?*

THE SHIP MADE IT FOR ME.

YOU GOT SHORT-CHANGED.

IT MADE **ME** A WHOLE BODY, I HEAR.

'COURSE, IF SAM WAS INVOLVED, I CAN JUST **GUESS** WHAT I'M WEARING...

OWWW!

OW? ***WHAT*** OW?

ROIYA?

CUTWINGS! ON **OPEN** COMMLINK!

I WASN'T HIDDEN -- THEY KNEW WHERE I WAS ALL ALONG!

AND THEY JUST GAVE A KILL ORDER!

KILL?

NO, ROIYA.

YOU **CAN'T** DIE!

THIS IS **NOT** SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN!

I'M WITH YOU ON THAT OPINION, JeMERIK.

NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT, THOUGH.

SAM, ARE YOU ANYWHERE CLOSE?

JUST LOST ATTITUDE THRUSTERS...

...I'M PRETTY CLOSE TO DEAD IN SPACE.

UNGH! ...MAKE THAT VERY CLOSE.

ROI! NO, NO, NO...

NO! THIS IS NOT RIGHT!

JeMERIK, DO SOMETHING!

IF YOU CAN, DO IT NOW.

THEY'RE POWERING UP THE TWO-STAGE CANNON TO FRY ME...

...THE WORST PART IS HEARING THE ORDERS BEING GIVEN.

OH, SAM, SORRY IT DIDN'T--

NO,ROI! NO GOODBYES!

I'M HELPIN' THE SHIP'S FIELDS WITH MY POWER--

-- WE'LL MAKE IT!

GIVE ME THAT!

WHAT D'YOU THINK YOU'RE DOIN'?

YOU USE *YOUR* POWER, SAM.

I'LL FLY.

I CAN *MAKE* THIS SHIP DO THINGS YOU'D NEVER DREAM OF...

TRUST ME!

ROIYA'S DEATH WILL *NOT* BE ALLOWED!

ROI? I'M NOT EVEN GONNA BOTHER TRYIN' TO TELL YOU WHAT'S DOIN' HERE...

JeMERIK'S GONE MAD...

NO, I'M NOT MAD..

...I'M JUST *ANGRY*...

"...AND I...

"...DON'T LIKE...

"...HOW IT *FEELS!*"

Oh, SAM... WE'RE TOO LATE.

THE BITTERLUCK...

...THERE'S NO FIXING SOMETHING IN THAT SHAPE.

I'M SORRY.

I'M NOT GIVING UP ON HER!

NO, YOU'RE NOT! USE YOUR POWER, SAM!

NOW!

"I GET YOU-- YOU THINK THIS'LL WORK?"

"WE'LL *MAKE* IT WORK!"

"MORPH BOTH SHIPS INTO ONE...

"AND HOPE SHE'S STILL ALIVE INSIDE!"

"ROIYA?"

SHE HAD TO HAVE MADE IT! ROIYA'S A SURVIVOR!

ROI--?

GRAWWRR

YOU'RE NOT QUITE WHAT I HAD IN MIND...

...BUT IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU TOO, YOU LITTLE MONSTER.

HEY!

WHO'RE **YOU** CALLING MONSTER?

I THINK I LOOK BETTER THAN THAT.

QUITE THE WILD RIDE, COWBOY!

WHERE TO **NEXT?**

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TCHARUN: SUMMER PALACE

TEN YEARS AGO, I SWORE THE BLOOD OATH AGAINST THE HUMAN *SAMANDAHL REY.*

I HAVE THE RIGHT AND OBLIGATION TO PURSUE MY VENDETTA AT ANY TIME UNTIL THE HUMAN IS EXECUTED AT MY HANDS!

BUT BY INDULGING MY VENDETTA WITHOUT CAREFUL PREPARATION AND APPROPRIATE CONTROL...

...I HAVE BROUGHT MASSIVE DESTRUCTION TO TCHARUN...

...ALLOWED THE LOSS OF THE SULTAN RONOLO'S WIFE, ZANNIATI...

...AND CAUSED GREAT INJURY TO THE WEAPONSMASTER.

I AM AWARE THAT I HAVE NOT UPHELD MY RESPONSIBILITIES...

...AND HAVE BROUGHT DISHONOR TO MY NAME, THE ROYAL FAMILY, AND TCHARUN ITSELF.

SO I HUMBLY ACCEPT YOUR JUDGMENT OF MY FAILINGS...

...MOTHER.

THIS IS A SERIOUS MATTER, TCHLUSARUD.

IN THE PAST, I HAVE SUPPORTED YOUR VENDETTA BECAUSE IT WAS JUSTIFIED, BUT IT HAS NOW BECOME YOUR OBSESSION.

UNTIL THIS MATTER IS PERMANENTLY SETTLED, YOU FORFEIT THE TITLE OF SECOND INHERITOR AND ARE REMOVED FROM THE CHAIN OF SUCCESSION.

WE WILL CONSIDER REINSTATEMENT OF THIS RIGHT ONCE YOUR VENDETTA IS SATISFIED.

JUDGMENT HAS BEEN GIVEN.

MY WORD IS LAW.

END RECORDING.

DONE, YOUR HIGHNESS.

'SARUD!

I SHOULD HAVE DEVOURED YOU AT BIRTH, YOU WITLESS IMBECILE!

REMOVE THE ROYAL GOLD!

FROM NOW ON, YOU WILL WEAR THE COMMON ARMOR!

IF ONLY I DARED FILM THIS...

GAIA, THE HUMAN HOMEWORLD: PLANETARY UNION HEADQUARTERS.

SO SHE'S DONE IT.

BEING DISINHERITED WILL JUST MAKE TCHLUSARUD A BIGGER PROBLEM.

THE PRINCE WAS ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING A HUMAN ALLY, AND NOW THIS.

I THOUGHT HE WAS GETTING CHUMMY WITH THE SULTAN?

THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN NEGATED IF OUR BUTCHER HAD DONE HIS JOB.

AS IT IS... WE'RE BACK TO SQUARE ONE.

WE'VE LOST GROUND WITH THE SAURIANS, THE SULTAN, AND THE COLONY WORLDS...

...AND NOW WE'LL HAVE TO BEAR THE EXPENSE OF AN ASSASSINATION SQUAD TO ELIMINATE THIS STUPID NUISANCE...

...THE USELESS, UNCONTROLLABLE EX-SOLDIER WHO SOMEHOW GOT HIS HANDS ON A NEW, UNIDENTIFIED, UNREGULATED POWER SOURCE...

...SAMANDAHL REY.

WHAT'D YOU SAY, SAM?

I SAID, THINGS JUST COULD NOT BE BETTER'N THEY ARE RIGHT THIS VERY MOMENT!

FOR YOU, MAYBE.

I'VE MOVED UP A STEP, FROM NOTHING TO SOMETHING, BUT...

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, ROI.

AN' YEAH, WE'VE GOTTA FIND A FIX FOR YOU.

BUT JUST NOW WE'RE FREE AN' PEACEFUL AN' NOBODY'S LIGHTIN' UP OUR BACKSIDES WITH FIREPOWER...

...AN' WE'RE ALL STILL AROUND TO NOTICE.

NO THANKS TO YOU RUNNING OFF TO PLAY GLADIATOR WITH LOSER...

BUT, ROI --

I DID IT FOR YOU. I GAVE HIM ALLA YOUR LOVE...

...THEN MADE HIM FEEL YOUR PAIN.

YEAAUGH!

SPEAKIN' OF, *WATCH* IT WITH THOSE CLAWS, YOU LITTLE MONSTER!

ROI, YOU GOTTA TRAIN THIS THING BETTER...

WHA--?

TRAINING'S FOR THE SOLID PEOPLE, SAM. HE'S ALL YOURS.

I EVEN NAMED HIM AFTER YOU...

...TROUBLE.

SAM?

TROUBLE?

JOKE?

ARE YOU THERE, SOLDIER?

Huh?

Oh. YOU'RE A RIOT, ROI.

HEY -- IS HE HOUSETRAINED?

SO...

ZANNI...

YOU GOTTA HELP ME MAKE A COURSE DECISION HERE.

SEE, ROI AN' ME, WE HAIL FROM THE HOMEWORLD, BUT OUR FAMILIES RAN OUTTA ROOM FOR US AN' WE NEVER NAILED RESIDENCY PERMITS OF OUR OWN.

TANIPAL'S A BAD IDEA, WHAT WITH THE SULTAN ORDERIN' OUR DEATHS AND ALL...

THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE FROM, RIGHT, MEER?

Oh...NOT ORIGINALLY...

BUT I DON'T THINK I SHOULD GO BACK TO WHERE I CAME FROM.

GAIA'S OUT. TANIPAL'S OUT.

OF THE COLONY WORLDS, THAT LEAVES DELASSIA, ZANNI'S WORLD, AS OUR MOST LIKELY SAFE HARBOR.

Gaia

Victor

Kayseecay

DELASSIA

Tcharun

Tanipal

Brejhur

HOW 'BOUT IT, ZANNIATI?

YOU MIND IF WE MAKE CAMP ON DELASSIA?

I... ah...

DON'T YOU WANT TO GO HOME?

"WELL, YES -- BUT DELASSIA HAS SO LITTLE TO OFFER YOU."

"S'OKAY. LITTLE'S 'BOUT WHAT WE NEED."

TANIPAL PLANETARY UNION EMBASSY

PRRNNG

INCOMING MESSAGE LOGGED.

PRIORITY RED.

PERSONAL CODA ATTACHED.

INCOMING MESSAGE LOGGED.

PRIORITY--

SHUT UP.

IDENTITY: RONOLO IV, *SULTAN OF TANIPAL*

STATUS: ALLY, TENTATIVE
SEE ALSO: VESPER ACCORD
SECURITY ALERT 21-02

I WISH TO MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT TO THE PLANETARY UNION.

THE SAURIANS HAVE JUST INFORMED ME THAT MY WIFE **ZANNIATI** HAS FLED TCHARUN IN THE COMPANY OF THE OUTLAW **SAMANDAHL REY.**

PRRNNG

ENTER AUTHORIZATION FOR CODA.

TAKE CARE OF IT, GAENA. QUICKLY AND COMPLETELY...

...THE VESPER ACCORD AND MY CONTINUED SPONSORING OF YOUR PLUSH EMBASSY ON TANIPAL ARE RIDING ON MY SATISFACTION IN THIS MATTER.

OOOOH!

ZANNIATI AND SAMANDAHL REY!

WHAT ARE YOU TWO ***DOING?***

UNDOING TWENTY YEARS OF DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS!

DON'T MAKE ME GO HOME TO GAIA, YOU TWO...

...YOU'LL ***PAY.***

SO, WHAT IS IT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, ZANNI?
JeMERIK!
I--
I'M JUST...
...TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THE INTERNAL SCHEMATIC OF THIS STRANGE SHIP...
KLANK
...IT'S ALMOST AS IF IT'S BIGGER ON THE INSIDE THAN IT SHOULD BE...
...BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
BUT IMPOSSIBLE'S NOT UNUSUAL TO YOU, IS IT?
WHAT ARE YOU, JeMERIK MEER?
TRUST ME, YOU SAY, AND WE DO.
AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO SENSES SOMETHING WRONG ABOUT THAT?
SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST LESS OPEN TO SUGGESTION THAN OTHERS, ZANNI.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
SO I'M NOT BRINGING SOMETHING DANGEROUS TO MY WORLD?
Nah... UNLESS YOU MEAN SAM...
...OR HIM.

"ZANNI, WE'RE HERE. WANNA GIVE US A TOUR?"

"WELCOME TO DELASSIA. THIS IS *IT*.

"DELASSIA WAS IN THE PROCESS OF BEING COLONIZED WHEN THE UNION HALTED THE PROGRAM...

"...ONLY HALFWAY THROUGH CONSTRUCTION.

"WE HAVE MINOR COLONY STATUS AS A RESULT OF OUR NOT BEING ENTIRELY SELF-SUFFICIENT.

"MOST OF THE ENGINEERING TROOPS ABANDONED HERE PUT DOWN ROOTS AND STAYED TO SALVAGE WHAT THEY COULD OF THEIR TERRAFORMING WORK.

"THEIR SIDELINE, FIXING AND RETROFITTING SHIPS FOR GAIA AND THE OTHER COLONIES, BECAME THE BASIS FOR OUR ECONOMY.

"DELASSIA'S RICH WITH NATURAL RESOURCES, BUT THE EQUIPMENT TO MINE THEM IS STILL BEYOND OUR MEANS.

"MY MARRIAGE TO THE SULTAN WAS SUPPOSED TO CREATE A WORKING MINING PARTNERSHIP. BUT...

"...THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN.

"THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS I RAN...

I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE COMING HOME...

...SO I'M NOT SURE HOW I'M GOING TO BE RECEIVED.

HEY, IF THEY GOT A PROBLEM WITH YOU COMING HOME, THEY GOT A PROBLEM WITH ME.

THAT'S NICE, SAM.

GO.

EXPLORE.

EXPLAIN.

KICK TAIL.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME...

I'LL JUST STAY HERE AND WATCH THE SHIP.

WHY?

WHY NOT COME ALONG?

JeMERIK, YOU'RE TALKING TO A HOLOGRAPHIC CONSTRUCT TIED TO THIS PROJECTOR.

I CAN'T JUST DECIDE TO **LEAVE**...?

OR MAYBE I CAN...

HMMM?

HMMM...

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

JeMERIK, I CAN **FEEL** YOU!

I KNOW.

DON'T MENTION IT.

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU MADE THIS HAPPEN, BUT...

...THANK YOU.

OKAY, MAYBE I'M NOT LOOKING SO GOOD... SCARED THE PSEUDOSAUR.

GRAWWWR

WE'RE GONNA NEED A LEASH FOR THAT CRITTER. WE CAN'T HAVE HIM SPOOKING THE LOCALS.

'CAUSE THAT WOULD BE **MY** JOB.

I'M THE GHOST, RIGHT?

C'MERE, YOU!

WHOOPS!

RIGHT. I'M THE GHOST.

OH, WELL.

I DON'T FALL THROUGH THE DECK -- I CAN'T TOUCH YOU.

STILL ONE STEP BETTER THAN BEFORE, EVEN IF IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.

IT DOES MAKE SENSE...ENERGY HAS LIMITS...

ASSUME YOUR SYSTEM PERMITS A LIMITED PHYSICAL INTERACTION. HAVING AUTO-PLANE ORIENTATION ALLOWS A PSYCHOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP TO "*NORMAL*" THAT--

JeMERIK...

THERE'S NO NEED FOR JARGON.

NOBODY ASKED FOR AN EXPLANATION.

JUST HOW MUCH ***CAN*** YOU DO?

SO HERE'S THE DEAL.

WE REGISTER INTENT TO IMMIGRATE WITH THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT, THEN HAVE A LITTLE TALK WITH THE LOCAL LEADERS TO GET ***YOUR*** SITUATION STRAIGHTENED OUT -- TELL 'EM HOW THE SULTAN TREATED YOU AN' ALL.

I'M ASSUMIN' PEOPLE HERE KNOW WHO YOU ARE, RIGHT?

I'M FAIRLY WELL KNOWN.

IS THIS SAM'S USUAL WAY OF FORMULATING A PLAN OF ACTION?

SAM?

PLAN?

YOU HAVEN'T BEEN PAYING ATTENTION, HAVE YOU?

ZANNIATI'S HOME!

YOU GUYS GOT THE PARTY READY?

THAT OUGHT TO GET US AN IMMEDIATE PRIVATE APPOINTMENT WITH DELASSIA'S SECURITY FORCES...

I'M SORRY, BUT YOU CAN'T JUST BARGE INTO THE CAPITOL AND --

OH.

YOU'RE... HERE.

YES.

PLEASE INFORM THE PRESIDENTS OF MY RETURN.

NO NEED, MA'AM.

THEY'RE EXPECTING YOU.

ZANNIATI ORIBATTA, WE ARE SURPRISED AT YOUR UNEXPECTED RETURN TO DELASSIA.

YOU HAVE BROKEN YOUR CONTRACT WITH THE SULTAN WITHOUT CAUSE OR COUNSEL.

YOU *DO* UNDERSTAND THAT THIS DEMEANS THE PEOPLE OF DELASSIA AND THREATENS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SULTAN.

YES, MADAME PRESIDENT, MISTER PRESIDENT.

WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE...

MADAME ORIBATTA, YOU WILL PLEASE COME WITH US.

WE WILL CONTINUE THIS FORMAL REBUKE PRIVATELY.

OH, NO!

ANYTHING YOU TWO GOT TO SAY TO ZANNI CAN BE SAID RIGHT HERE!

NO, SAM, IT'S ALL RIGHT.

ZANNIATI, I REGRET HAVING TO SPEAK TO YOU SO IN PUBLIC.

I KNOW...

WAIT, YOU TWO.

KLEK

NOW WE CAN SPEAK FREELY.

MOM! DAD!

WELCOME HOME, BABY GIRL!

ZANNI!

COULD YOU HAVE BEEN *COLDER* TO ME OUT THERE?

DON'T BE SILLY. I DON'T HAVE TO EXPLAIN POLITICS TO *YOU*.

Oh, MY POOR LITTLE ATI-ATI! I HEARD HE *HURT* YOU?

WE'RE SO PROUD OF YOU, PRINCESS. THE SACRIFICES YOU'VE MADE FOR ALL OF US HERE...

Oh, SWEETIE, WE MAY HAVE BEEN AGAINST YOUR IDEA, BUT TELL US --

-- WAS IT WORTH IT?

I WON'T LIE AND SAY IT WAS THE BEST OF EXPERIENCES, BUT I KNEW WHAT I WAS GOING TO DO WHEN I DECIDED TO MARRY RONOLO.

SO IF YOU'RE ASKING DID I ACCOMPLISH WHAT I'D HOPED TO...

...YOU KNOW ME...

...WOULD I HAVE COME HOME OTHERWISE?

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"WITH THE ECONOMY OF THE ENTIRE PLANETARY UNION FAILING, IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE NEEDS OF THE YOUNGEST AND POOREST COLONY WORLD WERE GOING TO BE OVERLOOKED.

"DELASSIA'S ECONOMY IS LARGELY CENTERED ON SHIP REPAIR.

"WE HAVEN'T YET BEEN ABLE TO SET UP AN EXTRACTION OPERATION LARGE ENOUGH TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES THIS PLANET OFFERS--

"--TOO EXPENSIVE.

"I WAS YOUNG, RESTLESS, DESPERATE TO BE ANYWHERE BUT HERE BUT UNWILLING TO JUST ABANDON MY HOME.

"I LOVE SHIPS, AND THERE'S NOT ONE I CAN'T PILOT WITH THE BEST, BUT AS THE ONLY CHILD OF THE PRESIDENTS, DELASSIA NEEDED ME TO BE A POLITICAL ADVANTAGE, NOT A HOTSHOT.

"WE'D BEEN STRATEGIZING WITH ONLY THE UNION IN MIND WHEN ***TANIPAL*** PRESENTED AN OPPORTUNITY.

"THE SULTAN RONOLO WAS SEEKING NEW AMUSEMENTS, AND HE'D SEEN A HOLO OF ME.

"HE OFFERED A ***VERY*** ATTRACTIVE BRIDEPRICE.

"TANIPAL WAS THE WAY STATION BETWEEN THE UNION WORLDS AND THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD.

"SOONER OR LATER, ***EVERYONE*** COMES TO TANIPAL.

"HAVING AN OPERATIVE STATIONED THERE COULD ONLY HELP US MAKE IMPORTANT POLITICAL CONTACTS AND MARRIAGE TO RONOLO WOULD GIVE ME ACCESS INSIDE THE PALACE..."

DELASSIA: COLONIAL HEADQUARTERS.

...SO I PURSUED DELASSIA'S INTERESTS IN THE MOST OLD-FASHIONED WAY -- BY MARRYING FOR GAIN.

I TOLERATED RONOLO'S ABUSE UNTIL I HAD TO GET OUT...

...YOU KNOW THE STORY FROM THERE.

NOT THAT WE ***APPROVED*** OF WHAT OUR DAUGHTER WAS DOING...

...BUT SOMETIMES THERE'S NO STOPPING HER.

ZANNI DECIDED THAT THIS WAS HOW SHE WAS GOING TO BEST SERVE DELASSIA, AND SHE TURNED OUT TO BE AS INTUITIVE AS EVER.

AND SINCE IT GOT HER OUT OF THE PILOT'S SEAT, IT SEEMED ULTIMATELY ***SAFER...***

ALTHOUGH, IF WE'D KNOWN OF THE ***BEATINGS*** SOONER...

NOTHING WOULD HAVE CHANGED. I HAD A ***MISSION...***

...AND THAT'S A CONCEPT YOU'RE ALL FAMILIAR WITH.

SO YOU LET US WALTZ IN HERE LIKE CRIMINALS WHEN YOUR FAMILY'S IN CHARGE'A THE WHOLE DAMN PLANET?

WE *ARE* CRIMINALS IN SOME TOWNS, SAM.

SO WHAT'S YOUR POINT, ZANNI?

WHAT'RE YOU WANTIN' OUTTA US WE HAVEN'T PROVIDED UP TO NOW?

SAM! TONE DOWN THE ATTITUDE, COWBOY! WE *NEED* A JOB!

DELASSIA IS PREPARED TO MAKE YOU AN OFFER, SAMANDAHL REY.

STAY.

HELP US.

WE'LL GIVE YOU *ANYTHING.*

YEAH, Um...

Uh...

ZANNI, YOU LED US AROUND LIKE A HOUND ON A BAITED SCENT TRAIL AN' ALL BUT LIED TO ME!

JUST HOW'RE WE SUPPOSED TO TRUST ANY OFFER *YOU* MAKE?

SAM...

THE GREATEST SACRIFICE IS WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO GIVE BUT YOUR OWN LIFE.

SOME GO TO WAR AS SOLDIERS.

SOME FIND ***SUBTLER*** WAYS TO WAGE WAR, SUCH AS GOING OFF TO A NEW PLACE AND PRETENDING TO BE WHAT YOU'RE NOT.

MARRYING FOR POSITION, NOT LOVE.

THINK ABOUT IT, SAM.

SAMANDAHL REY, MAY I SPEAK TO YOU ***PRIVATELY?***

OKAY, SO I *GET* THAT YOU DID WHAT YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD TO DO, BUT *WHAT* ARE YOU DOIN' NOW?

ALL BUT OFFERIN' YOURSELF TO ME, AN' YOU A MARRIED WOMAN!

I WASN'T BEING *OFFERED* TO YOU!

NO ONE WAS BEING *OFFERED* TO YOU!

DELASSIA WAS OFFERING YOU ANY OF THE *RESOURCES* AT OUR DISPOSAL...

FOOD!

A PLACE TO *LIVE!*

WHATEVER *THINGS* YOU NEED!

AND HOW *DARE* YOU HOLD ME TO THAT MARRIAGE!

YOU'RE A SOLDIER --

--JUST AS YOU RISK YOUR BODY IN COMBAT, I RISKED MINE!

IN FACT, ALL I HAVE LEFT TO OFFER YOU *IS* MY BODY--

-- BECAUSE YOU STOLE MY HEART BACK ON TANIPAL.

ZANNI, I MAY BE THICKER'N SAURIAN SKIN SOMETIMES, BUT I'M NOT STUPID.

YOU PLAYED ME TO GET OFFA TANIPAL.

YOU PLAYIN' ME NOW?

SORRY, SAM.

YOU'LL HAVE TO FIGURE THAT OUT ON YOUR OWN!

TCHARUN: SUMMER PALACE.

SWIPPPPT

SWIPT

SLIT

NNH?

SNAPPT

WHO *DARES?*

I'LL GUT YOU FOR THIS INSUL--

WEAPONSMASTER?

YOUR PRIDE HAS BEEN BATTERED, PRINCE TCHLUSARUD, BUT YOUR WARRIOR'S INSTINCTS ARE UNHARMED.

YOU NEEDED TO KNOW THAT.

I AM NO PRINCE.

MY ELDER HAS DENIED ME THAT TITLE.

NEVERTHELESS, TCHLUSARUD, YOU ARE STILL AN ABLE WARRIOR...

...ONE WITH WHOM I WILL BE PROUD TO ALLY MYSELF.

WE HAVE BOTH FELT THE STING OF SHAME BECAUSE OF THE ***SAME*** DISHONORABLE HUMAN, TCHLUSARUD.

THE ITCH OF MY HEALING BODY IS NOTHING NEXT TO MY BURNING DESIRE FOR VENGEANCE.

I CLAIM THE RIGHT TO JOIN YOUR BLOOD OATH AGAINST SAMANDAHL REY...

"...TOGETHER WE WILL GUARANTEE HIS DESTRUCTION."

WELL, DOESN'T THAT BEAT ALL...

NEVER THOUGHT IT'D BE ANY SHIP'A MINE WORTH STARIN' AT...

WOW...

...WONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FLY A BIRD LIKE THAT...

YEAH, I REMEMBER FEELIN' SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT...

"...WAY BACK WHEN..."

COOL...

SAM!

SAM!

C'MON, HONEY, WE HAVE TO GET HOME.

Oh, SAM...

THEY TURNED US DOWN, SAM.

DAD AND I DON'T QUALIFY TO GET YOU AN ADULT RESIDENCY CERTIFICATE FOR GAIA...

...WHICH IS GONNA MEAN THE ARMY OR A COLONY WORLD FOR YOU.

I'M S'SORRY.

THEY TURNED US DOWN?

SAM, IT'S LOOKIN' LIKE WE CAN'T OFFER YOU ***ANY*** KIND OF OPPORTUNITY...

...YOUR FUTURE'S GONNA HAVE TO DEPEND ON WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ***YOU*** CAN MAKE FOR YOURSELF.

VREEEEP

KREEEEEEE

WE CAN ONLY--

Oh, MY GOD!

MOM!

GET DOWN!

SAM...?

MOM?

YOU OKAY?

Shhh.

YOU *LISTEN.*

WHATEVER YOU DO, YOU GET YOURSELF OFF THIS SORRY USED-UP WORLD AND NEVER LOOK BACK.

I MEAN IT, SAMMY.

YOU DO WHATEVER YOU *HAVE* TO DO TO SURVIVE, BUT YOU NEVER LET YOURSELF GET AS COLD AS GAIA, Y'HEAR ME?

SAM?

HELLO?

YOU SEEM A MILLION MILES AWAY...

JUS' THINKIN', ROI.

ME, TOO.

I DID A LITTLE SNOOPING WHILE YOU WERE WITH THE PRINCESS.

ZANNI PICKED UP ***SOMETHING*** ON TANIPAL, AND DELASSIA'S GOING TO MAKE SOME SORT OF ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE UNION TOMORROW.

SHE USED US, SAM. USED US TO GET HOME WHATEVER SHE STOLE.

I'M NOT SURE I LIKE THAT.

ONLY T'GIVE HER PEOPLE A SHOT AT A BETTER LIFE. YOU AN' I BOTH KNOW HOW HARD THINGS WERE ON GAIA.

LOOK AROUND. IT'S PRETTY FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS HERE.

YOU HEARD HER SAY IT-- THEY GOT RESOURCES, BUT NO ACCESS.

ROI, WITH THIS POWER, I DO HAVE SOMETHIN' TO OFFER.

JUST A LITTLE HELP COULD MAKE A BIG CHANGE AROUND HERE.

DO YOU SEE WHAT I'M SAYIN'? THERE'S A BIG NEED HERE, AN' I'M GONNA GIVE 'EM A HAND.

WHAT?

YOU'RE NOT GONNA *CHARGE* THEM FOR THE PRIVILEGE?

WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH "ALL FOR ME" SAM REY?

IT'S A GREAT IDEA, SAM AND I'VE GOT ANOTHER THOUGHT...

...I WONDER IF WE CAN USE OR CLONE THE TECH ON OUR SHIP?

IF I CAN OVERCOME MY SHOCK AT SAM'S GENEROUSITY ENOUGH TO CONCENTRATE... THAT'S GONNA BE TOU--

WHA--?

JeMERIK?

COME IN, PO[illegible] YOU DON[illegible]EED TO [illegible]DE.

WHO...

NO, *WHAT*...

...ARE YOU?

ONE WHO CAN BE BOTH MANY AND ONE!

AT THE MOMENT, JeMERIK MEER, FORMER SULTAN'S GUARDSMAN AND NOW MENTOR TO A SIGIL-BEARER...

...BUT I'M AFRAID YOU CAN'T SHARE THAT LAST PART WITH ANYONE.

AND YOU ARE THE WOMAN WHO IS ENDANGERING MY PLAN.

"I CAME TO TANIPAL ON A MISSION...

"...A SMALL STEP IN A GREATER GAMBIT, PART OF A SCHEME I CAN'T SHARE WITH ***ANYONE***.

"THEN ***YOU***...

"...SOMETHING ABOUT YOU STRUCK ME. YOU WERE SO...

"...BRIGHT WITH LIFE!

"THE SAURIANS ATTACKED, AND I KNEW YOU WOULD DIE... BUT SOMETHING STRANGE HAD HAPPENED TO ME.

"I WAS DRAWN TO...MODIFY...

"...WHAT I MYSELF KNEW ***MUST*** BE.

"I HAD COLLECTED ZANNI FOR SAM, BUT YOU...

"...I SAVED YOU FOR ***ME***."

"...YOU? I... I THOUGHT SAM'S POWER SAVED ME."

"...MAYBE IT COULD HAVE...BUT IT WAS ***MY*** TOUCH THAT CONNECTED YOUR ESSENCE TO THE *BITTERLUCK*."

I'D NEVER FELT LOVE BEFORE. I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW POWERFUL IT WAS.

AND YOU...LOVE ME.

EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU. WHAT YOU WERE, WHAT YOU ARE, AND WHAT YOU WILL BE.

AND DO I HAVE TO...

...LOVE...

...YOU?

THAT'S TOTALLY UP TO YOU.

I GUIDE, I DON'T CONTROL.

ROIYA, EVERYTHING HAS A REASON, BUT...

JUST TRUST THAT I WOULD NEVER DO ANYTHING TO HURT YOU OR SAM.

SO, IN OTHER WORDS...

..."TRUST ME," HE SAYS.

TRUST YOURSELF...

...YOU KNOW HOW TO FIND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.

THE KEY TO A TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE IS *HERE*.

THE ONE WHO CAN ACCESS IT IS *YOU*.

"I MAY BE A LITTLE MORE THAN HUMAN...

"...BUT SO ARE YOU."

OKAY, ORANGE EYES, HERE GOES...

THIS...IS WEIRD.

I'VE DONE SOME EXPLORING THROUGH THESE DATABANKS, BUT I...

...I WAS JUST A LITTLE AFRAID OF LOSING MYSELF IN ALL THIS.

IF YOU GET LOST...I'LL COME FIND YOU.

HERE'S SOMETHING GOOD--

--THE DIAGRAM OF THE STARDRIVE FROM THIS SHIP--

THAT'S IT!

I'M DOWNLOADING THE INFORMATION--

IF WE CAN DUPLICATE THIS DRIVE FOR HUMAN SHIPS--

--WE ALREADY KNOW IT OUTPERFORMS THE SAURIANS' ARC DRIVE!

SOUNDS GOOD.

SO...

...HOW DID IT FEEL?

URGGGET

WASN'T THAT EXHILARATING?

OKAY, MEER...

...POINT ABOUT "MORE THAN HUMAN" TAKEN.

JUST DON'T SCARE ME ANY MORE WHILE I GET USED TO IT...

"...AND UNTIL YOU TELL ***SAM.***"

SAMANDAHL REY, YOU ARE A TRULY AMAZING PIECE OF WORK.

REBUILDING A DECAYING STRUCTURE IN PLACE?

IF I'D KNOWN YOU WERE CAPABLE OF ***THIS,*** I WOULDN'T HAVE BOTHERED LOOKING FOR ***POLITICAL*** MEANS TO HELP DELASSIA MAKE REPAIRS.

SPEAKING OF TANIPAL, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU STOLE FROM THE SULTAN, BUT ***THIS*** PUTS IT TO SHAME.

GET YOUR ENGINEERS TO WORK ON A MODEL--

--IT'S THE DRIVE FROM OUR SHIP.

AND IT'S A GIFT.

A GIFT.

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

SAM'S URBAN RENEWAL WAS SHOWING ME UP.

I HAD TO DO MY SHARE FOR OUR TEAM.

HUMANS, I MEAN.

I UNDERSTAND ***THAT.***

THANK YOU.

YOU'RE WELCOME!

JUST WAIT 'TIL YOU SEE MY NEXT TRICK.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN, SAM?

ARE YOU STAYING?

AND...WHAT DO YOU REQUIRE IN RETURN?

YEAH, WE'RE STAYIN', RIGHT, ROI?

BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO GIVE US A THING BEYOND THE ONE THING WE WERE MISSING AND WE SEEM TO BE FINDIN' HERE...

...A *HOME*.

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WE CAN SPEAK FREELY HERE, TCHLUSARUD.

THIS CHAMBER IS FULLY SCREENED. BETWEEN THE BAFFLES, THE FOLIAGE AND THE WATERFALL'S AMBIENT SOUND, WE ARE SECURE.

...THE DISCREET RECORDING DEVICES FOR THE REAL WORLD"...

I APPRECIATE YOUR UNDERSTANDING MY NEED FOR DISCRETION.

OF COURSE! **ALL** YOUR NEEDS WILL BE ATTENDED TO WHILE YOU ARE MY GUEST HERE ON TANIPAL!

ZANNIATI!

MORE DRINK FOR OUR GUEST!

...VID SYSTEM UNABLE TO CORRECT FOR GYROSCOPIC ACTIVITY...

ZANNIATI IS MY NEWEST PRIZE.

I SAVED HER FROM A SHORT, NASTY, UNEVENTFUL LIFE ON ONE OF THE LESSER COLONY WORLDS BY TAKING HER AS MY WIFE.

MY THIRTEENTH, I BELIEVE.

...ENTER HORIZON FIND COMMAND FOR AUTO-CORRECT...

OH, YOU NEEDN'T MENTION **ME**.

DON'T LET ME **DISTRACT** YOU TWO FROM YOUR IMPORTANT CONVERSATION.

...IMAGE ONLY COMMAND TO DELETE SYSTEM COMMENTARY...

THANK YOU FOR SELECTING Delec™ FOR YOUR SURVEILLANCE NEEDS FOR A FREE DOWNLOAD OF DELEC'S NITE LITE IMAGE ENHANCEMENT SYSTEM CLICK HERE

"PICTURE'S KINDA JUMPY.

"I COULDN'T ALWAYS KEEP MY ARM STILL."

AS I WAS SAYING, TCHLUSARUD, OUR LAST CONVERSATION LEFT ME INTRIGUED..

...DID YOU DELIVER MY THOUGHTS ON THE MATTER TO THE MATRIARCH?

"CAN'T YOU SHUT OFF THE SUBTITLES?

"SHHHH, SAM! WE'RE JUST GETTING TO THE GOOD PARTS."

"ROI, FROM WHERE I SIT, IT'S ALL GOOD PARTS."

YES, AND I SPEAK FOR HER TODAY.

AND YOUR ANSWER IS...?

TCHARUN AGREES TO SUPPORT YOUR ASSERTION OF TANIPAL AS THE NEW SEAT OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT.

WE WILL ASSIST YOUR EFFORTS TO OVERTHROW THE CURRENT UNION WITH SHIPS, TROOPS, AND WEAPONS.

BUT WE WANT THE COLONY WORLDS BREJHUR AND KAYSEECAY GIVEN OVER TO US FOR SAURIAN EXPANSION...

...WITH THEIR HUMAN POPULATIONS INTACT.

COLONY WORLDS?

I ASSUMED YOU WOULD WANT THE PRIME WORLD... GAIA.

THROUGH INGESTION, WE HAVE LEARNED MUCH ABOUT YOUR KIND.

WE HAVE GAINED LANGUAGE, SCIENCE, AND ART.

WE DESIRE A BROADER SELECTION OF INPUT AND EXPERIENCE. COLONISTS HAVE OFTEN **EXPERIENCED** MORE THAN YOUR CROWDED CITY DWELLERS.

INGESTION...?

YOU HUMANS...

...YOU ARE CHANGING US.

WE WISH TO BECOME **MORE** LIKE YOU.

BEFORE SURPASSING YOU.

THEREFORE, WE REQUIRE A PLENTIFUL SUPPLY OF HUMAN STOCK.

YOU...

...YOU DON'T JUST CONSUME, YOU...

...**BECOME?**

WE **ADAPT.** WE **ARE** THE SUPERIOR SPECIES.

WHICH IS WHY I'M THROWING MY LOT YOUR WAY.

HUMANS AND SAURIANS HAVE TO FIND **PEACE,** NOT THIS ETERNAL WARFARE.

IF WE MUST SCHEME TO REACH THIS BLESSED GOAL, SO BE IT...

...AS LONG AS WE DIRECT THE WAR BETWEEN US TO A SWIFT AND PEACEFUL CONCLUSION.

I AGREE. BOTH OUR SPECIES HAVE BEEN GROUND DOWN BY THIS NEVERENDING WAR. IT'S TIME TO FORCE THE PEACE...

...**AND** GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM YOU SO WANT TO RULE.

WHILE YOU SAURIANS TURN YOURSELVES INTO HUMANS.

MORE THAN JUST HUMAN.

RONOLO, I THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY. THE SETTING IS BEAUTIFUL...

...AND YOUR WIVES LOOK VERY TASTY.

DEI ASSTA: COLONIAL HEADQUARTERS

THAT'S QUITE A PRIZE YOU'VE GOT THERE, ZANNI.

I MANAGED TO COLLECT OVER A HUNDRED HOURS OF LIVE CONVERSATION, ENOUGH TO DESTROY RONOLO.

HE WAS WILLING TO ALLOW THE PEOPLE OF TWO WORLDS TO BE...EATEN FOR HIS OWN PERSONAL GLORY.

TELL ME, SAM-- DOES OUR ARMY KNOW WHAT THE SAURIANS DO TO PRISONERS?

YEAH...

...WE KNOW.

MILITARY'S KEPT IT MOSTLY NEED-TO-KNOW.

FIGURED IT TO BE A MORALE KILLER FOR THE PUBLIC, I EXPECT.

MORALE KILLER?

THEY NOW SPEAK OUR LANGUAGE, REVERSE-ENGINEER AND PERFECT OUR DESIGNS, AND ARE TAKING ON HUMAN FORM.

DON'T WE NEED TO KNOW THAT?

THE SAURIANS ARE STRONGER AND FASTER THAN US.

IF THE UNION CAN'T GET ITS HEAD OUT OF ITS OWN INTERNAL POLITICKING AND TAKE BACK THIS WAR BEFORE THE SAURIANS MAKE THEIR ***NEXT*** TECHNOLOGICAL LEAP...

...HUMANS MAY CEASE TO EXIST.

IT WON'T COME TO THAT. ***SOMETHING*** WILL COME ALONG TO STIR THINGS UP.

AND IF IT DOESN'T, *YOU'LL* STEP IN?

THAT'S NOT WHAT I SAID, IS IT?

UNION'S GOT IT COVERED.

SAURS GET HUMAN ENOUGH, THEY'LL JUST *DECOMMISSION* 'EM LIKE THEY DID ROI' AN' ME.

END OF PROBLEM.

NOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I WENT TO TANIPAL, SAMANDAHL REY?

YEAH, I WAS THINKIN' ABOUT THAT.

YOU HAD THAT RECORDER ON YOUR ARM THIS WHOLE TIME...?

SO--

--DID IT CATCH THE FLASH WHEN I FIRST SAW YOU?

AAAH...

ZANNI, THEY'RE READY.

EXCUSE US, PLEASE.

LIGHT LEVEL'S GOOD.

WE CAN ROLL.

I HOPE SO.

I RESPECTFULLY ADDRESS THE CONGRESS OF THE PLANETARY UNION. MY NAME IS ZANNIATI ORIBATTA.

MOST OF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH ME AS THE DAUGHTER OF DELASSIA'S CO-PRESIDENTS OR AS THE WIFE OF SULTAN RONOLO OF TANIPAL, BUT I AM ALSO THE NEWLY-DESIGNATED ENVOY FROM DELASSIA TO THE UNION.

I WILL BE REPLACING POULAN TEMPUS AS DELASSIA'S REPRESENTATIVE, AND I ASK THAT YOU MAKE TIME AVAILABLE TO VIEW A VIDFILE I WILL BRING WITH ME.

THIS RECORDING CONTAINS PROOF OF COLLUSION BETWEEN SULTAN RONOLO AND THE SAURIAN PRINCE TCHLUSARUD.

I WILL ALSO BE BRINGING THE SPECIFICATIONS OUR ENGINEERS HAVE DEVELOPED FOR A NEW STARDRIVE THAT OUT-PERFORMS THE SAURIAN ARC SYSTEM.

THIS IS OUR GIFT TO THE UNION.

ALL WE ASK IN RETURN IS ***FULL*** REPRESENTATION IN CONGRESS AND PROTECTION AGAINST THE SAURIAN OR TANIPALI FORCES IF NEEDED.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME...

GAIA: PLANETARY UNION HEADQUARTERS

"...AND A SWIFT DECISION ON THIS MATTER."

THIS IS BLACKMAIL!

IT MAY VERY WELL BE, BUT IF SHE REALLY HAS WHAT SHE SAYS, IT'S WORTH PLAYING ALONG.

TELL LADY ORIBATTA WE ACCEPT. LET'S GET A LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE--AND THE NEW DRIVE SPECS--FOR OURSELVES.

SO WE CAN KISS UP TO THE LITTLE COLONY THAT ROARED?

EXCUSE ME.

VRRRRRT

BIP BOOP BIP

TANIPAL: THE SULTAN RONOLO'S PALACE.

YES, TEO?

THERE'S AN INCOMING MESSAGE.

SECURITY CHANNEL.

HIGH PRIORITY.

VERY GOOD!

YOU HAVE INFORMATION, MR. LEAHUPP?

IT'S BAD.

YOUR MISSING WIFE HAS SURFACED WITH A RECORDING OF YOU AND THE SAURIAN PRINCE.

SHE'LL BE BRINGING IT TO GAIA IN PERSON.

I PROMISED YOU A TIP--DOES THIS SQUARE MY DEBTS?

IF I MAY COUNT ON YOUR ***ASSISTANCE*** IN ***INTERCEPTING*** THIS RECORDING, IT JUST MIGHT.

CONTACT ME AGAIN WITH YOUR ANSWER.

KLEK

KLEK

TEO!

CONTACT TCHLUSARUD FOR ME.

NOW THAT HE'S BEEN CUT OFF FROM THE THRONE, HE'LL PROBABLY BE EAGER TO ASSIST ME IN A SMALL MATTER OF ***RETRIBUTION***...

"...AND IT WOULD DELIGHT ME TO NO END TO HAVE HIM MAKE A MEAL OF MY DISRESPECTFUL WIFE."

I CAN'T SAY HE'D BE MY FIRST CHOICE, BUT IT'S SO WONDERFUL TO FINALLY SEE ZANNI FALL IN LOVE.

THAT'S LOVE?

DON'T YOU REMEMBER?

YOU'RE *LEAVIN'?*

I'LL HAVE TO TESTIFY BEFORE THE CONGRESS, AND MY STAYING ON DELASSIA AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT PUTS MY WORLD IN JEOPARDY.

WHY ARE YOU SO SURPRISED? IT'S NOT AS IF I HAVE ANY REASON TO STAY...

YES.

YOU DO.

THEN I'LL HAVE A REASON TO COME BACK.

TAKE GOOD CARE OF DELASSIA FOR ME, SAM.

OUR SHIP'S BEING PREPPED AND WILL BE READY BY THE TIME WE BOARD.

YOU *ARE* READY TO LEAVE?

HUH?

HE'S GOIN'?

I NEED JeMERIK TO GO WITH ME...

...FOR PROTECTION...

...AND BECAUSE I'M AFRAID TO LEAVE HIM HERE.

PROTECTION?

I COULD PROTECT YOU JUST FINE!

SO JUST WHAT IS GOIN' ON THERE?

SAM?

COME IF YOU WANT, ROI--

--I NEED T'GET OUTTA HERE FOR A BIT.

I WILL *NEVER* UNDERSTAND YOUR KIND.

MY KIND?

HOLOGRAMS?

GRAWWWP

GRAWWWP

DON'T GET SO BENT, SAM.

SO SOME PLANS WERE MADE WITHOUT YOU. SO WHAT?

YOU MISSED MOST OF THE DISCUSSIONS BECAUSE YOU WERE OUT REBUILDING THE CITY!

I JUS' DON'T LIKE BEIN' LEFT OUTTA THE DECISION-MAKING.

SHE KNEW, HE KNEW--IT'S OBVIOUS YOU KNEW.

BUT OL' SAM REY'S THE LAST TO KNOW.

YOU'RE NOT LAST, SAM...

...SEVERAL MILLION PEOPLE DON'T KNOW AND DON'T CARE, BUT YOUR BEING HERE HELPS PROTECT THEM.

THAT'S NOT THE POINT, ROI.

OH, I GIVE UP.

YOU EXPLAIN IT TO HIM.

YOU?

YOU DIDN'T LET ZANNI TELL THE WHOLE STORY, SAM.

YOU!

WHAT D'YOU THINK YOU'RE DOIN' UP HERE?

THINKING.

SAME AS YOU.

THINK *THIS* THROUGH, SAM.

WHEN ZANNI'S NEWS GETS LEAKED TO TANIPAL AND TCHARUN, *DELASSIA BECOMES A BIG TARGET.*

SHE NEEDS A HERO TO PROTECT HER.

NOW, ZANNI THINKS YOU'RE THAT HERO.

SHE HAS TO GO TO GAIA.

WE NEED YOU *HERE* BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY REAL DEFENSE SYSTEM DELASSIA HAS.

WE?

YOU GOT NO RIGHT SAYIN' *WE.*

THERE'S NOTHIN' BETWEEN YOU'N ZANNI!

NOT YET.

THAT'S IT--YOU'RE GOIN' DOWN!

HNNGH!

YOU STAY AWAY FROM HER!

OH? AND WHY SHOULD I DO THAT?

BECAUSE YOU SAID SO?

BECAUSE THIS SAYS SO!

HWWWNF!

SO WHAT'S THE TRUTH OF YOU, MEER?

I CAN HEAR YOU, YOU CAN HEAR ME, AN' I DON'T SEE ANY LIFE SUPPORT BETWEEN YOU AN' THE LACK'A ATMOSPHERE HERE.

SO I SAY THAT MEANS I DON'T HAVE TO HOLD BACK.

I'VE SEEN YOU AT WORK-- *NEITHER DO I!*

HEY, YOU TWO--

--NO HITTING THE BYSTANDERS.

Hah.

LIKE YOU *COULD* HIT THE BYSTANDER.

DON'T WORRY, GUYS--

--I'LL HAUL BACK THE SPARE PARTS WHEN YOU'RE ALL DONE.

YEOWTCH.

I HOPE YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT SAM *NEEDING* THIS, JeMERIK.

YOU GONNA LET THE CIVILIAN WHUP YA, SOLDIER?

ROI, THERE'S SOMETHIN' JUST NOT RIGHT ABOUT THAT GUY.

YEAH, HE'S IN LOVE WITH ME.

IT'S A SICKNESS.

DESTROYS MEN'S MINDS.

THERE WON'T *BE* ANY.

YOU MOVIN' IN ON *TWO* WOMEN, MEER?

ZANNI *AND* ROIYA?

I CARE ABOUT BOTH, AN' I'M NOT LETTIN' YOU HURT EITHER ONE'A THEM!

LET ME?

YOU HEARD ME.

I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE THE POWER TO ***STOP*** ME, SIGIL-BEARER.

C'MON!

YOUR BEST SHOT!

LET'S SEE IT!

ALL RIGHT, I'LL LET YOU ***SEE*** IT...

...THEN YOU'LL SEE YOUR PLACE IN--

WHAT'S THAT?

WHA--

--AW, NO...

SAURIANS.

LISTEN UP, MEER.

WE'VE GOTTA GIVE THIS A REST.

AT LEAST UNTIL WE TAKE CARE'A *THAT.*

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Barbara Kesel • Scot Eaton • Andrew Hennessy • Wil Quintana

DELASSIA: ORBITAL TRANSIT CORRIDOR A

ONE DOWN...

...BUT LOTSA LIZARD TAIL LEFT T'KICK.

YOU TWO GOT ME A HEAD COUNT YET?

I JUST WANT A SIMPLE PROJECTION T'BE CERTAIN I CAN KEEP MOST'A 'EM OFFA DELASSIA.

KEEP GOING, SAM.

GET IT TO YOU IN A MINUTE.

JeMERIK...

...WHAT'S WITH THIS?

COULDN'T YOU JUST FLAP YOUR ARM AND ZAP THEM OUT OF THE SKY OR SOMETHING?

AND IF I COULD, WHAT WOULD SAM LEARN FROM THAT?

"WELL, HE MIGHT LEARN TO *COUNT*.

"HE HASN'T NOTICED YET THAT HE'S BEEN GONE FOR HALF AN HOUR...

"...AND THAT PACK'S ONLY GOOD FOR TEN MINUTES OF THRUST.

"WHICH DOESN'T SEEM TO BE SLOWING HIM DOWN.

"LET'S JUST HOPE NOTHING GETS PAST HIM--

"--OUR TEAM DOWN THERE'S GOT ***NO*** DEFENSE."

NO SECURITY NOISE FROM DELASSIA CENTRAL...

...WE'RE IN CLEAN.

TCHLUSARUD DIDN'T FAIL ME. THIS SHIP IS ALL HE PROMISED.

IF THE WEAPONS PERFORM AS EXCELLENTLY...

...KEEPING ZANNIATI FROM DELIVERING THAT VIDFILE TO THE UNION SHOULD BE THE EASIEST ASSIGNMENT YOU MEN EVER PERFORM FOR ME!

WHEN WE FIND HER, DON'T KILL HER IMMEDIATELY...

...I WANT TO CARVE OFF A SLICE OR TWO FOR OUR BENEFACTOR FIRST.

MY MEN HAVE DONE A SWEEP OF THE STATION, BUT I WANT YOU ALL ARMED ANYWAY.

IF THE SAURIANS GET PAST US, WE CAN'T HAVE THEM CAPTURING DELASSIA'S PRESIDENTS.

THIS IS ALL MY FAULT.

I THOUGHT I'D BE *HELPING* DELASSIA...

BOOOOM

EEYOW!

HNNNGH!

YAAAH!

EXCELLENT!

MY WIFE IS ISOLATED, CUT OFF FROM ESCAPE, *AND* AWARE OF HER PREDICAMENT.

THIS IS DELIGHTFUL!

GRAWWWWR

KRA KOOM

MOM?

DAD?

WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK, SAM.

YOU LET US KNOW IF YOU GET TIRED AND WE'LL BE RIGHT THERE TO PICK YOU UP.

TIRED?

YOU KIDDIN', ROI?

I FEEL *GREAT!*

FACED WITH OVERWHELMING ODDS...

...HE DOESN'T EVEN CONSIDER GIVING UP.

HE IS LIKE ONE OF US.

YOUR DEDICATION TO VIGILANCE IS COMMENDABLE, TRENIN.

BUT WE CAN'T HAVE YOU DISTRACTED BY THIS ONE SIGIL-BEARER WHEN WE NEED YOU FOCUSED ON ***OUR*** TROUBLES...

...AND IT'S HARDLY FAIR THAT ONLY ***ONE*** SIDE IN THIS BATTLE BOASTS A CHAMPION!

IMPOSSIBLE!

OUR CUTWING FLEET IS BEING DECIMATED, YET THE HUMAN APPEARS ONLY TO BE...*PUNCHING* OUR SHIPS?

PRINCE TCHLUSARUD *SAID* THE HUMAN WAS BAREHANDEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF BLADE ARENA.

DON'T MENTION THAT NAME.

WE MIGHT BE FORCED TO SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS TCH--

HREEEHENK

YEAH...

...DON'T MENTION THAT NAME.

THE HUMAN--

--KILL IT!

YEOWWTCH!

WHAT'S UP WITH THIS?

I C'N HANDLE AIRLESS SPACE, BUT SMALL FIRE IS A PROBLEM?

FOCUS, TCHLUSARUD!

IF YOU ARE TO FACE THE HUMAN AND TRIUMPH...

HREEEEN

...YOU MUST BECOME...

...SOMETHING MORE THAN ADEPT!

YOU MUST BECOME THE LIVING SPIRIT OF BATTLE!

KRAMMG

KLAMMGK

AGAIN!

MASTER...?

BUT I AM THE LIVING SPIRIT OF BATTLE!

KHYALHTUA!

YOU HONOR US, KHYALHTUA.

HAS OUR WEARY DISPLAY OF THE MARTIAL ARTS OFFENDED YOU?

QUITE THE CONTRARY!

I AM HERE TO BESTOW A GIFT OF POWER UPON HE WHO MIGHT BEST SERVE TCHARUN...

...HER NOBLE SON *TCHLUSARUD.*

MIGHTY KHYALHTUA!

NEVER IN MY DREAMS DID I IMAGINE--!

BUT...

...IT CANNOT BE.

...I CANNOT ACCEPT.

I AM ONLY A POOR STUDENT OF THE FORMS OF COMBAT.

MY TEACHER IS THEIR MASTER.

HE IS MORE WORTHY OF THIS HONOR THAN I.

I BLESS YOUR SELFLESSNESS, TCHLUSARUD.

IT WILL BE AS YOUR GOOD JUDGMENT WILLS.

AS YOU HAVE SERVED THE ARTS OF COMBAT FAITHFULLY...

...IT PLEASES ME TO SHARE SOME MEASURE OF MY POWER WITH YOU!

HRAEEEEENK!

WEAPONSMASTER!

NO MORE. FROM THIS TIME ON, I HONOR HIM WITH THE NAME OF A GOD OF OLD--

KHYRADON!

SERVE ME WELL AS TCHARUN'S CHAMPION. FIND THE HUMAN WHO WOULD THREATEN HER AND DESTROY HIM.

AS YOU WISH, GODDESS!

KHYALHTUA BE PRAISED!

SAM?

SAM?

I DON'T LIKE THIS, JeMERIK-- HE'S STOPPED TRANSMITTING.

UNLESS YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO ADD?

I THINK HE'S JUST BUSY...

"...DOING WHAT HE DOES BEST."

THIS SHIP'S CARPETED WITH LIZARDS...

...BUT A FEW GOOD SHAKES'LL DUST OUT THIS RUG!

LOOK AT ALL THE DAMAGE...

...HOW CAN I EVER MAKE UP FOR THIS?

DRAW HER ATTENTION, THEN FIRE ***NEAR*** HER.

I WANT HER TO HAVE TIME TO ***APPRECIATE*** WHO IT IS THAT HAS DELIVERED HER TO OBLIVION.

WE'LL MAKE THIS ***LAST*** A WHILE.

I HAVE HER IN SIGHTS.

MAKE A NOISE.

KLATTER KLUNK

WHA--?

YOU?!

YOU'RE NOT GETTIN' TO DELASSIA!

AN' I'LL TAKE OUT EVERY LAST LIZARD THEY SEND T' REPLACE YA!

EVERY LAST ONE...

...WHERE'S THE COMM SET?

ROI?

THERE YOU ARE!

HAD ME WORRIED, SOLDIER!

SAM-- SOMEBODY GOT THROUGH!

THE DELASSIAN FLEET--REPAIR PLATFORMS AND ALL-- GOT HIT.

WHAT? WHO?

ROIYA, THE MAIN ACTION WAS JUST T'DISTRACT US--

ZANNI!

"SHE'S DOWN THERE WITHOUT ANY'A US T'PROTECT HER!"

WISH YOU WERE HERE, SAM.

WITH JeMERIK MISSING, I'M SORRY TO HAVE PUSHED YOU AWAY.

I COULD REALLY USE YOU NOW, ESPECIALLY IF RONOLO'S GOONS TURN OUT TO BE--

"--ARMORED."

SULTAN RONOLO, DO WE RETURN FIRE?

NOT YET. I'M ENJOYING HER TORMENT...

"...WE'LL LET HER RUN A LITTLE LONGER..."

"...BECAUSE THERE'S NOWHERE SHE CAN GO."

TAK TAK TAK TAK

DEAD END -- AGAIN!

YOU'D THINK I DIDN'T KNOW THIS CITY...

SO --

--YOU'RE HERE TO KILL ME FOR HIM?

I'M HERE TO DO WHATEVER HE WANTS ME TO DO TO YOU.

SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

SAM?

DON'T WORRY--

--I GOT 'EM!

WHAK

HATE TO UNDO MY OWN REPAIR WORK...

OH--

NO--

BRUUM

...BUT THAT OUGHTA QUIET 'EM DOWN.

YOU OKAY, ZANNI?

I'M...

...FINE...

YOU DON'T SOUND FI--

Oh.

I SAW THE SECURITY HOLOS OF YOUR FLIGHT FROM TANIPAL, REY...

...AND THIS CURRENT ***DEMONSTRATION*** LETS ME ASSUME ***YOU*** WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ***EXTENSIVE*** DAMAGE DONE TO MY WORLD...

...AND THE KIDNAPPING OF MY ***WIFE.***

PERHAPS ***CIRCUMSTANCES*** WILL ALLOW US TO DISCUSS A REASONABLE PRICE FOR REPARATIONS.

I COULD PUT THAT ABILITY OF YOURS TO WORK IN ***EXCHANGE*** FOR--

ZANNI WASN'T KIDNAPPED.

SHE CHOSE T'LEAVE YOU OF HER OWN ACCORD.

GOT TIRED'A BEIN' BEATEN ON, I GUESS.

AN' NO AMOUNT'A STALLIN'S GONNA GIVE YOUR BOYS ENOUGH TIME T' CATCH UP.

KRAT TR

KRAK

YOU JUST DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?

I PLAY BY ***NEW*** RULES.

GYAAH!

SKUTCH

C'MON-- LET'S GET YOU OUTTA HERE.

YOU'LL GET ***NOWHERE*** WITH HER.

YEAH, YOU JUST SAVE THAT SMUG FACE SO'S I CAN KICK IT LATER.

ZANNI, GET BEHIND ME.

KRAK

KLAK

KLAK

KLATTR

KLATTR

KRAK

KLOOM

WHA--?

THAT'S PLASMA TECH?

WHAT'RE HUMANS DOIN' WITH--

GNNNGH!

SAM!

S'OKAY.

JUS' LET ME KNOCK SOME SENSE INTO THOSE ROCKHEADS.

SAM...YOUR WOUND.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. I'VE SURVIVED WORSE.

AND YOU'LL SURVIVE THIS ONE-- LOOK.

HEALING ITSELF ALREADY.

ANOTHER SURPRISE, THOUGH NOT SO MUCH AS SEEIN' THE SULTAN'S MEN WITH PLASMA SHOOTERS.

JUST ANOTHER OF RONOLO'S ATROCITIES.

SAM...?

NOT THAT I'M NOT GLAD FOR THE SAVE, BUT WEREN'T YOU BATTLING THE INVASION?

HOW'D YOU GET DOWN HERE SO FAST?

Oh...JUST LUCK...

I WAS THERE WHEN RONOLO COMMISSIONED THEM--I THINK THEY'RE IN THE VIDFILES.

"...I FOUND A PARKING SPACE RIGHT OUTSIDE YOUR BUILDING."

LET'S GIVE THEM JUST ANOTHER MINUTE, ROIYA.

I THOUGHT YOU WANTED TO BREAK THEM UP -- WASN'T THAT WHAT YOUR FIGHT WITH SAM WAS ALL ABOUT?

NOT AT ALL.

SAM HAD TO HAVE HIS BOND WITH ZANNI THREATENED IN ORDER TO RECOGNIZE IT.

ROIYA, SAM ***NEEDS*** TO KNOW LOVE.

IF HE DOES, THEN HE'LL ***KNOW*** WHY I ***HAVE*** TO DO THIS.

LOVE AGAIN.

JeMERIK...

"...YOU HAVE SUCH A ***STRANGE*** WAY OF SHOWING YOU CARE."

Uh, hi, SIGIL readers!

Gina here, with some horrible… I mean *wonderful* news. We have a special captor…that is, *guest* here today, and he's taken the entire building with weapons and soldiers, uh, I mean, with his *charm* and *personality*. And now, without further ado, the Second Inheritor of the throne of Tcharun, Prince Tchlusarud!

MY GRATITUDE FOR YOUR COURTEOUS INTRODUCTION AND GENEROUS "WELCOME," HUMAN. BUT I AM NO LONGER A PRINCE. I HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THE CHAIN OF SUCCESSION IN SHAME FOR MY ACTIONS INVOLVING THE WAR CRIMINAL **SAMANDAHL REY.** I AM NO LONGER **ALLOWED** TO WEAR THE ROYAL GOLD ARMOR. IT IS BUT ANOTHER INSULT THE APE MUST COMPENSATE FOR WITH HIS **BLOOD.**

I'm sorry to hear that, Tchlusarud. Hey, did you know I went shopping today? My friend went to *help*. We looked *in* the mall, and I found *distress* in the dress shop. Then I bought some *S.O.S.* pads at the grocery store…

SILENCE! I AM NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR TALES OF **BARGAIN-HUNTING!** IT HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION THAT THIS IS A FORUM FOR THOSE WHO FEEL THAT THE **SAMANDAHL REY** APE IS ACTUALLY A **HERO,** RATHER THAN MERELY A THUGGISH SLAYER OF INNOCENT **SAURIANS.** SO I HAVE COME TO SPREAD THE WORD OF **TRUTH** TO YOU **DELUDED MAMMALS.** READ THE FIRST LETTER AT ONCE!

Dear Sam,

Man, you kick so much ***. The way you beat Loser AND his Weaponsmaster without even breaking a sweat was SO COOL! Way to stomp a couple ugly lizards, dude!

In fact, Loser isn't even in your league. You need a tougher villain, maybe one who doesn't look so much like a shaved Grinch! Why don't you make a handbag and a nice pair of boots outta him and get a REAL villain?

SIGIL RULES!

S. Hawkings
via the internet

YOU WILL **PAY** FOR THAT INSULT, HUMAN. MY SOLDIERS WILL SCOUR YOUR BACK-WARDS PLANET TO FIND THIS **"INTERNET"** YOU SPEAK OF, AND THEN YOUR SUFFERING WILL BE THAT OF A **THOUSAND DOOMED MEN.** YOU WILL BEG TO TASTE MY **VENOM** AS YOUR SCREAMS ECHO IN **FUTILITY.** BUT WE **SAURIANS** ARE A MERCIFUL PEOPLE, AND EVENTUALLY YOUR TORMENT WILL END WITH A SWIFT AND MUCH-DESERVED **DEATH.**

THIS IS GOING **WELL.**
NEXT LETTER, PLEASE.

Of course, Tchlusarud. Oh, look! This letter is addressed to you.

❖

Dear Great and Merciful Prince Tchlusarud,

Boy, you're sure great. I wish SIGIL was about you instead of that stupid Sam guy. The way you struggle to master forms in the blade arena, your devotion to Khyalhtua, and your belief in duty and honor – it's YOU who is the admira one in that book, and not the greedy, vicious Samandahl Rey. He's just a jerk, really. How I hate him, I kid you not, taking valuable panel time away from your fascinating exploits.

Also, you look great in your armor. I was wor dering how you keep so fit and trim…could y please describe your workout routine?

Scot Ea
Likes Rept

P.S. Please don't kill me.

THIS IS A VERY GOOD QUESTION, HUMAN. YOUR LIFE WILL BE **SPARED.**

AS FOR MY WORKOUT ROUTINE: FIRST, I FAST FOR THREE SOLAR CYCLES, ALLOW ING NO **IMPURITIES** INTO MY SYSTEM; THEN, I PERFORM THE PAINFUL **MUSCU LAR CONTRACTION EXERCISES** NECE SARY TO INSURE THAT MY GILL SACS AR FULL OF PRECIOUS **VENOM;** FINALLY, I STUDY UNDER MY HONORED **WEAPON MASTER** IN THE BLADE ARENA, ATTEMP ING TO MASTER THE SACRED FORMS OF COMBAT UNTIL MY BODY AND SPIRIT AI **AFLAME** WITH **AGONY.** ALSO, I AVOID SWEETS AND FATTY FOODS.

❖

Dear Tchlusarud,

I'd just like to say that Mark Alessi MADE me write the story where Sam kicked your…I mean, the story where your richly-deserved victory was stolen from you by the treachery of Samandahl and his friends, and of course, I also like to point out that I learn languages re fast, and maybe you could use a writer to ma some Saurian comics? I have this idea where mild-mannered Saurian teenager gets bitten b a radioactive human…

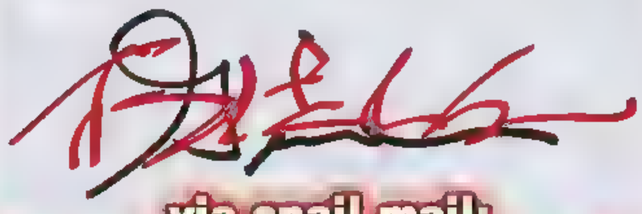
Anyway, never mind that right now. I've draw a little map to Mark's office. HINT: He's hidin in the closet!

Barbara Ke
Willing to Cooper

YOU HAVE MADE AN ERROR, HUMAN. W SAURIANS **DESPISE** TRAITORS. PREPARE TO BE ELIMINATED…

THAT IS, UNLESS YOU AGREE TO WRITE MORE SAURIAN **FEMALES** INTO YOUR **"STORIES."** LUSCIOUS, **EGG-BEARING** FEMALES, PREFERABLY, WITH PROMINEN THORNY CRESTS AND GENEROUS GILL SACS! **YUM!** IN FACT, I HAVE AN **IDEA…**

NEXT ISSUE: *It's an all-Saurian issue, featuri Prince Tchlusarud, now gloriously restored to his rightful place as Second Inheritor, returning in triumph to his home planet, with the head of hi enemy, Samandahl Rey, mounted on the front o his ship! Thrill to his adventures as he is met by MANY luscious, egg-bearing females with prominent thorny crests and generous gill sacs!*



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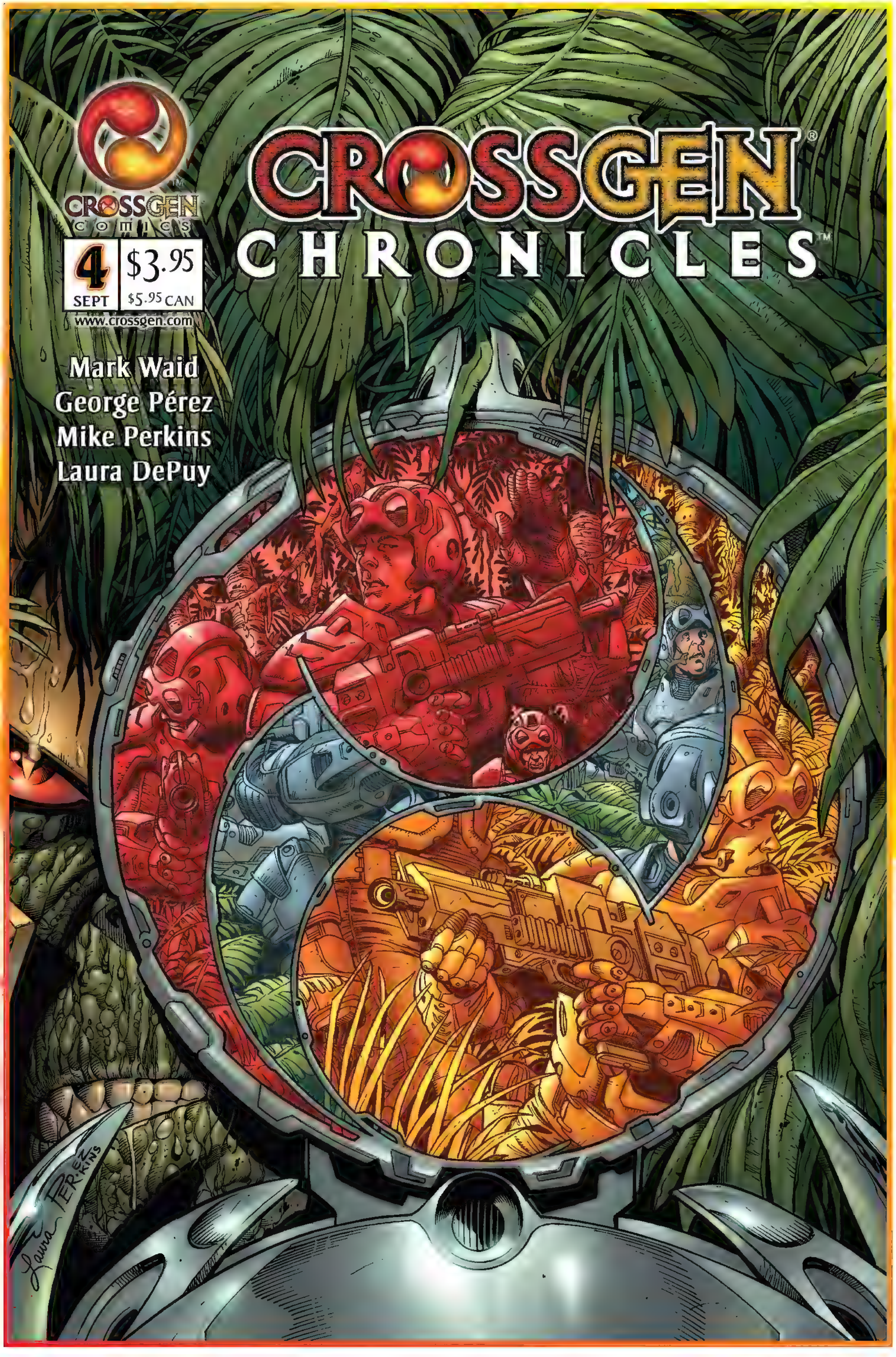


THERE ARE CERTAIN DOWNSIDES TO BEING DEAD.

Oh, DON'T GET ME ***WRONG***. THERE ARE ALSO ***PLUSES*** TO BEING... WHAT, A GHOST IN THE MACHINE...?

I GOT TO TRADE THE EVENTUAL RAVAGES OF ***OLD AGE*** FOR A PERKY SET OF TACHYON THRUSTERS AND THE PERMANENT CURVES OF A STARSHIP CHASSIS.

AND UNLESS SAM DECIDES IT'S "FUNNY" TO PROGRAM GRAY HAIR INTO MY HOLOMATRIX, NO ONE WILL EVER CALL ME ***GRANNY***.

BUT I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I DIDN'T MISS THE WORLD OF THE TACTILE. OF THE LITTLE FLESH-AND-BLOOD PLEASURES THAT MEANT THE WORLD TO ME FRESH OUT OF BOOT CAMP...

...LIKE THE TASTE OF A CRUNCHPUFF BAR...

...OR THE RECOIL OF MY FIRST CLACKRIFLE...

...OR HOW IT FELT TO GRAB A PITCHER OF SUDS AT THE BLASTER BAR...

...AND JAM SOME STUPID TOWNIE'S *HEAD* INTO IT.

HEY, *BIGSHOULDERS* -- WHAT'S YOUR NAME AGAIN?

SA-URK-

...*SAM*...!

GOT IT. HEY, *SAM*--

--*INCOMING*!

!

*HOOO*AH! TAG 'IM AND *BAG* 'IM, RILEH!

NO, SINTOR! NOR WILL I "*LOCK AND LOAD*" OR "*LIGHT THE FIRES AND KICK THE TIRES!*"

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO HAVE *FUN*.

FUN?! CRIMI*NENT*LY, YOU COULDA *KILLED* THE GUY! SAVE IT FOR THE *SAURIANS*, WHY DON'TCHA?

KRAK

SO'S YOUR *MOTHER*--

--LEGGO MY *FACE*--

POW

BY *DOSE*!

--CALL THAT A *SCAR*?

KLIK

UH-OH.

KLAK

SO...

...WHO'S UP FOR SOME *PRISON RATIONS*?

I *ASK* THIS BECAUSE THE LOCAL COPS *AND* THE M.P.S ARE FALLIN' ALL OVER THEMSELVES T'*GET* HERE...

...AND I'VE GOT HALF A MIND TO LET 'EM TAKE THE WHOLE DAMN *PLATOON!* NOW... WHO *STARTED* THIS?

S-SERGEANT WHILTS, SIR! I...I DIDN'T *MEAN* TO...HOW WAS I TO...

I MEAN, COME ON! *WHOSE MOTHER* REALLY *IS* IN THE *CIRCUS?*

...YOU GET A *BRAWL.* YOU EXPECTED *DIFFERENT?*

THAT'S WHAT *HAPPENS* WHEN YOU FIGHT *GRAVITY!*

"...WHEN YOU FIGHT *GRAVITY!*"

Ah. FOOT-IN-*MOUTH* DISEASE. I SEE.

FULL *MOON,* EMPTY *GLASSES*...YOU *SNEEZE* FUNNY IN A POWDERKEG LIKE *THIS,* RILEH...

GO. HAUL *ASS* WHILE I HOLD OFF THE COPS.

AND IF THIS *EVER* HAPPENS AGAIN...

...I MEAN, *EVER*...

...SAVE A PLACE FOR *ME.*

ALL RIGHT! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

THAT'S WHAT *I* WANT TO KNOW! WHAT *IS* IT WITH THE *SERVICE* IN THIS JOINT...?

THAT WAS SERGEANT WHILTS FOR YOU. NOT A *ONE* OF US WOULDN'T HAVE MARCHED ACROSS A *STAR* FOR THAT MAN.

SO, OUT OF ***RESPECT,*** THAT WAS ***IT*** FOR THE ***BRAWLS***...WHICH WAS A REAL ***SHAME***...

...BECAUSE THAT WAS THE MOST ACTION ***ANY*** OF US HAD SEEN SINCE ***ENLISTING.***

THREE MONTHS ***LATER,*** JUST AS I WAS CONSIDERING TAKING UP ***NEEDLEPOINT*** FOR THE ***THRILL*** OF IT...

...WE ***FINALLY*** GOT A ***MISSION.***

SAM?

C'MON, SAM! WE'RE LATE FOR THE BRIEFING!

YOUR CHRON'S FAST. WE'VE GOT FIVE MINUTES. BE RIGHT THERE.

BACK THEN, NONE OF US WERE SURE WHAT TO MAKE OF SAM. HE WASN'T SHY, HE WASN'T A ***JERK*** -- HE WAS JUST ***DISTANT.*** KEPT TO ***HIMSELF.***

WHICH, OF COURSE, EVERYONE TOOK TO MEAN THAT HE ***WAS*** A JERK, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY...

...BUT I'M GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF.

DON'T LET ME HOLD YOU ***UP.***

'S OKAY.

CRUNCH-PUFF?

NO, THANK YOU.

RIGHT. WOULDN'T WANT TO GET COURT-MARTIALED FOR FRATERNIZING, WOULD YA?

FUNNY. LET'S ***GO.***

WHY ***NOT?*** NOTHING ***INTERESTING*** KEEPING US ***HERE.***

SAM'S ***QUARTERS*** WERE AN EXTENSION OF WHAT WE LAUGHINGLY CALLED HIS ***PERSONALITY:*** NEAT. ORDERLY.

TIGHT.

AND ***DEADLY*** ***DULL.***

AWRIGHT! GIMME SOME OF THAT SWEET, SWEET COMBAT...

Um...⇒MUNCH⇐... WHERE ARE THEY HIDING THE REST OF THE PLATOON, FARQUAR?

DUNNO. WHATEVER THIS IS, THEY'RE KEEPIN' IT SMALL. JUST A FEW MISSION SPECIALISTS LIKE YOU AND ME... AND REY, THERE...

...RASPLEY, TOWMAZEE, RILEH AND HASTON.

'SUP.

HEY, I THINK I HEAR SOMEBODY COMING...

KCHUNK

HERE WE GO...

PLACES, PEOPLE. WE GOT A LOT TO COVER.

SGT. GRANNART... WHAT'S THE NEWS ON SGT. WHILTS? ANY WORD YET?

THERE IS...

...BUT YOU'RE GOING TO BE SORRY YOU ASKED.

LIGHTS.

AS MOST OF YOU KNOW, WHILTS HEADED UP A STEALTH MISSION ONTO THE PLANET *TCHARUN* TO INVESTIGATE *SAURIAN ACTIVITY.*

SPECIFICALLY, TO FIND OUT WHY THE SAURIANS HAVE SO QUICKLY EVOLVED ALONG *HUMANOID LINES.*

UNFORTUNATELY, WHILTS AND HIS MEN WERE *CAPTURED.*

"ONE SOLDIER *ESCAPED*... FOR A *WHILE*. HE GAVE HIS *LIFE* TO SMUGGLE OUT THESE IMAGES CAPTURED *WITHIN* THE SAURIAN *HOLDING CAMP.*

"IMAGES THAT FINALLY REVEAL TO US WHAT...

"...WHAT *BECOMES* OF THEIR HUMAN PRISONERS."

BIOMNEMONICS.

OUR SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND THAT ***DNA*** HOLDS CERTAIN *"RACE MEMORIES"*...AND THAT SOME ***ORGANISMS*** CAN ***INGEST*** THAT ***DNA*** TO ***OBTAIN*** THOSE MEMORIES.

IT APPEARS THAT THE SAURIANS ARE NOT ONLY ***EQUALLY*** GENETICALLY CAPABLE OF THIS... *"FEAT"*...

...THEY CAN CARRY IT SEVERAL STEPS ***FURTHER.***

BY CONSUMING THE DNA OF ***NON***-SAURIANS, THEY *"ABSORB"* MORE THAN SIMPLE ***MEMORY.*** THEY GRADUALLY ASSUME THEIR VICTIMS' ***PHYSIOLOGICAL TRAITS*** -- HENCE THEIR RATHER ***UNPREDICTABLE*** HISTORY OF ***EVOLUTION.***

WE ***SUSPECT*** THAT ANYTHING THEY ***GLEAN*** IS MORE ***GENERAL*** THAN ***SPECIFIC,*** BUT IT'S POSSIBLE THE SAURIANS COULD EVEN *"PICK UP"* SMALL, DETAILED ***MEMORY FLASHES...***

...WHICH MAKES THIS A MATTER OF ***UNION SECURITY.***

HOW DO WE ***STOP*** IT?

SO *FAR*, HUMAN FLESH IS A RELATIVE *RARITY* TO THOSE REPTAURS. REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE *ROYAL FAMILY* CONSUMES THE *BULK* OF IT. CAN YOU *LIVE* WITH THAT?

HELL, NO!

THEN GO MAKE AN *EXAMPLE* OUT OF THEM! THIS INFORMATION IS STRICTLY *NEED-TO-KNOW*--SO IT'S UP TO YOU TO GET TO THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD, FIND THE ROYALS--

--AND PAINT A "*HANDS OFF HUMANS*" SIGN WITH THEIR *BLOOD!*

SAMANDAHL REY WILL ACT AS YOUR *FIELD COMMANDER.*

THANK YOU, SGT. GRANNART.

YOU'RE ON A *STEALTHCRAFT* IN *TEN TICKS. HUSTLE!*

I REMEMBER SAM SITTING STILL AND SILENT AS THE GRAVE FOR THE ENTIRE TRIP...

...ALONE, AS USUAL.

YOU HEARD ME! WHEN I FIND THE LIZARD WHAT ATE WHILTS, I'M GIVIN' HIM A .22-CALIBER *COLONOSCOPY!*

FIND 'IM? HOW YA GONNA TELL THOSE REPTAURS *APART?*

HE'S *RIGHT!* LET'S JUST BURN 'EM *ALL!*

OUR FIRST MISSION, AND IT WAS EVERYTHING WE'D EVER *DREAMED* IT WOULD BE. THE ONLY THING *MISSING* WAS A ROUSING SPEECH FROM OUR *FIELD COMMANDER.*

FAT CHANCE OF *THAT.*

...HEARD THEIR BLOOD RUNS *COLD,* MAN! *COLD!*

YEAH, WELL...

...THEY'RE NOT *ALONE...*

OUR *TARGETS,* OF COURSE, HAD NO IDEA WE WERE *COMING.*

AS WE CAME IN FOR A *LANDING* AND STARTED PUTTING OURSELVES *TOGETHER...*

...THE *SAURIANS* WERE UNDERGOING THEIR *OWN* LITTLE RITUAL...

<KYALHTUA BLESS THE HUNTERS, THAT THEY FIND BOUNTIFUL PREY.>

<KYALHTUA BLESS THE PRINCE'S BLADE ON THIS, HIS FIRST HUNT DAY.>

<KYALHTUA BLESS TH--->

<PLEASE. WITH ALL DUE *RESPECT,* PRIEST.>

<...YOU'RE SCARING AWAY ALL THE *GAME.*>

<HA! RELAX THOSE *SCALES,* TCHLUSARUD! *FIRST HUNT* IS LIKE WADING THROUGH A *POND!*

<AT LEAST IT WAS FOR *ME*...

<I BROUGHT BACK A THAKASAUR SO BIG THAT *NONE* COULD DENY I WAS AT LAST AN *ADULT*...

<...WITH THE FULL RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES *THEREOF,* eh, CHARUUT?>

<HEH, HEH, HEH.>

<TCHUXXAN, I--->

<STAY CALM, LITTLE BROTHER.

<*NO* ONE'S EXPECTING YOU TO MATCH *MY* RECORD.

<ALL I'M SAYING IS THAT I'M *SURE* YOU WON'T EMBARASS YOURSELF LIKE YOU *GENERALLY* DO...>

<*TCHUXXAN!* STEP AWAY FROM YOUR BROTHER!

<I'LL NOT HAVE *ANYTHING* INTERFERE WITH MY YOUNGEST CHILD'S RITE OF MANHOOD!>

<HE WILL *NOT* FOUL THIS DAY, MOTHER.

<NOT *THIS* DAY.>

<TCHUXXAN, YOUR *OTHER* SIBLINGS ONLY *BARELY* MAINTAINED THEIR TEMPERS WITH YOU THROUGH THE YEARS.

<IF YOU EXPECT *TCHLUSARUD* TO DO *LIKE-WISE*...

<...YOU *MAY* BE *SURPRISED.*

<YOU'RE *WELCOME* TO PUSH YOUR BROTHER IN WHATEVER DIRECTION YOU *LIKE*--

<--BUT BEAR IN MIND THAT IT'S THE CORNERED ANIMALS WHO FIGHT THE *FIERCEST.*>

<THEN FIGHT HE SHALL, MATRIARCH. THERE IS SOMETHING *OUT* THERE.>

<*THANK* YOU, HUNTGUIDE. EVERYONE STAY *HERE.*

<I WILL RETURN WITH THE *KILL.*>

<JUST *REMEMBER,* BROTHER... *INSECTS* DON'T *COUNT.*

<*HAR!*>

I'M *IMAGINING* THE *CONVERSATION,* OF COURSE.

WITHOUT *TRANSLATORS,* THE MEANING WAS... *LOST,* SHALL WE SAY.

THANKS TO *DNA INGESTION,* THE SAURIANS COULD UNDERSTAND *OUR* LANGUAGE... BUT TO *US,* EVERY TIME THEY OPENED THEIR *MAWS...*
...THEY MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN *CROCODILES* WITH *HEARTBURN.*
PLIP
BLOOP
BRRRRRRRRRRATTTT
BRRRRATTTT

HSSSS
BRAKOW
BRAKOW
YAAAH!!
ZAAAK
AIIIEEE!
FACHOOM
Oh, SWEET GOD! THAT'S WHAT A PLASMA GUN CAN DO?
FIRE AT WILL!
BUDDABUDDABUDDA BUDDABUDDA
MOTHER OF--!
FACHOOM

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

KAGHOOM

WE WERE IN *TROUBLE.*

HOLY %*@!! I THOUGHT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE CRASHIN' A ***RELIGIOUS CEREMONY!***

HATE TA SEE WHAT THEY'RE PACKING WHEN THEY'RE ***NOT*** IN CHURCH!

BRAKOW BRAKOW

SO MUCH FOR OUR ***AMBUSH!***

I'M THINKIN' UNION INTELLIGENCE NEEDS TO WORK A LITTLE ***HARDER*** NEXT TIME, REY!

AGREED. ATTACKING DURING A SAURIAN CEREMONY MADE ***SENSE...***

...BUT MAYBE SOMEONE SHOULD HAVE TOLD US THEY'D ***BE CARRYING HUNTING WEAPONS?***

AAAAAAAA—

TOWMA!

NO!

BEFORE I COULD *BLINK*, THERE WERE CASUALTIES ON *BOTH* SIDES.

THEY'D GOTTEN THE *MATRIARCH* OUT OF THERE *IMMEDIATELY*--

DIE, MOTHERFUCKER, DIE!

--BUT THERE WAS STILL PLENTY OF THE *ROYAL BROOD* AROUND--

BACK *ATCHA*, PUSBAG!

-- AND TCHLUSARUD WAS LOSING *FAMILY* WITH EVERY PULL OF A *TRIGGER*.

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS WE'VE BEEN AT WAR WITH THE SAURIANS.

FOUR CENTURIES DURING WHICH WE'D MADE LEAPS IN TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS AND CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENT...

FOUR CENTURIES DURING WHICH WE'D ADVANCED UP THE EVOLUTIONARY LADDER...

...ALL OF WHICH COUNTED FOR NOTHING THAT DAY.

THAT AFTERNOON, WE WERE JUST MAMMALS AND REPTILES...

...BURNING AND BLEEDING...

...AND PRAYING TO GODS WHO PROBABLY COULDN'T HAVE CARED LESS.

CHK

BASTARD!

TELL ME, YOU CRAWLER! TELL ME WHO DID IT!

WHICH ONE OF YOU FREAKIN' ATE HIM?

WHO--?

PRIVATE RILEH! SHE'S...

...Oh, NO...

I KNOW YOU CAN UNDERSTAND ME! ANSWER ME!

WHICH ONE OF YOU ATE SGT. WHILTS?

RILEH, BACK OFF! THOSE SACS AT HIS NECK -- THEY'RE VENOM!

THEY'RE VENOM!

GHHUAAAAAGH!

RIIILEH!
BRRRRRRRRRRRAAATTTT
I REMEMBER BEING SHOCKED BY SAM'S OUTBURST. "I'LL BE DAMNED," I THOUGHT. "HE DOES HAVE A HEART!"
"RIGHT?"
SHE'S DEAD.
OF COURSE SHE IS, SINTOR.
SHE WAS DEAD THE MINUTE SHE MADE THIS ABOUT REVENGE.
SHE FORGOT THE MISSION OBJECTIVE.
"SHE FORGOT THE..."?
FORGET YOU.

SAURIAN CORPSES ALL *AROUND*...BUT IN THE *CONFUSION*, WE'D OVERLOOKED SOMEONE *SPECIFIC*.

SHAD

THE *HUNTER* WHO'D LAIN IN *WAITING* FOR JUST THE RIGHT MOMENT TO *STRIKE*.

HSSSSSSSSS

TCHLUSARUD.

HALF HIS *FAMILY* WAS DEAD AT OUR HANDS.

ONLY SAM'S *ARMOR* KEPT HIM FROM BEING KILLED WITH *ONE BLOW.*

ANYBODY! I NEED BACKUP HERE!

KLIK KLIK KLIK

THEN AGAIN...

RRARRGH!

...*SAM* WASN'T EXACTLY IN THE BEST MOOD, *EITHER.*

SKRAAK

AGGH!

KRNCH

SKRKT

REPEAT! I NEED *HELP!* DOES ANYONE *COPY?* *ANY--*

FWAM

PLOOSH

HKKKKOFF!

SAM LATER SAID HE COULDN'T BELIEVE HIS *EYES*.

THE ONLY THING THAT *SAVED* HIM...

...WAS THAT TCHLUSARUD AND HIS BIG BROTHER WERE FIGHTING OVER WHO WOULD MAKE THE *KILL!*

NICE *THROW,* RASPLEY!

DON'T JUST *STAND* THERE, MEN! *SHOOT TO KILL!*

WITH *WHAT?* WE'RE OUT OF *AMMO!*

MAYBE...BUT IT'S STILL *FIVE AGAINST ONE...*

...SO I SAY WE DO THIS THE *OLD-FASHIONED* WAY!

HURRY! HE'S GETTING AWAY!

I SEE HIM!

WHAT? I CAN'T HEAR YOU!

I SAID, I SEE HIM! HE'S --

I NO LONGER REMEMBER WHICH STRUCK US FIRST:

A RASP LIKE BONES BEING DRAGGED ACROSS PAVEMENT--

I'M--WAIT--ING, HU--MAN--ZZ.

CkCOMME-- AN--GGET MEEE.

--OR THE DEAFENING DIN OF FALLING THUNDER.

RRRRRRRRRRRR

BROOAAAARR

HSSSK

CHAAAH

YOU HEARD HIM! ON MY MARK --

NO.

IT'S OVER.

OVER? BUT, COMMANDER, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT--!

MISSION *ACCOMPLISHED*, FARQUAR! WE *DELIVERED* OUR MESSAGE TO THE ROYAL FAMILY--

BUT--

--AND *THAT* IS WHAT WE WERE *SENT* TO *DO!*

IT'S A *TOUGH BREAK* THAT WE WEREN'T 100% *SUCCESSFUL* --

-- BUT WHEN YOU'RE AS OUTMATCHED FROM THE *GET-GO* AS *WE* WERE, AN OUTCOME LIKE THIS IS *INEVITABLE!*

IF YOU EXPECTED *DIFFERENT* --

-- THAT'ZZ -- WHAT *HAP-PENZZ* --

-- WHEN YOU FIGHT *GRAVITY.*

TO THE SHIP.

WHAT? BUT, SIR--

I SAID, TO THE *SHIP!*

LET'S *GO!*

--HADDIM *RIGHT WHERE WE* --

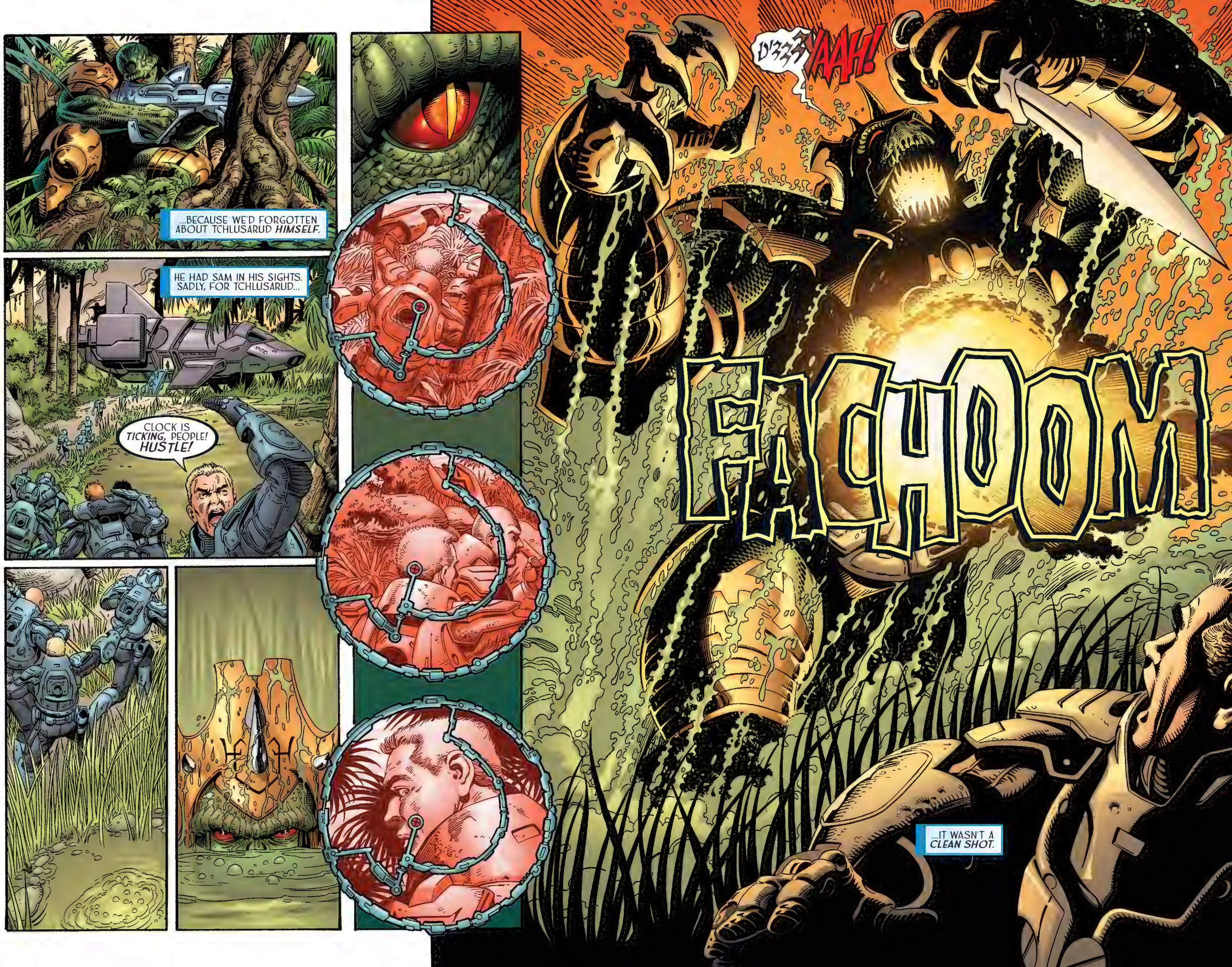
--MY *KID SISTER'S* BRAVER THAN --

--FEEL LIKE *PUKIN'*. HAD A *RIFLE,* I'D TAKE MY SHOT *ANYWAY*...

WOULDN'T DO YOU NO *GOOD,* FARQUAR. UGLY DONE *RUN OFF* ALREADY.

TRUE. TCHLUSARUD'S BROTHER WAS NOWHERE IN *SIGHT.*

WHICH LED US TO BELIEVE WE WERE *HOME FREE*...


...BECAUSE WE'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT TCHLUSARUD HIMSELF.
HE HAD SAM IN HIS SIGHTS. SADLY, FOR TCHLUSARUD...
CLOCK IS TICKING, PEOPLE! HUSTLE!
D'ZZZ
YAAH!
FACHOOM
...IT WASN'T A CLEAN SHOT.

NOOOOOO!

TCHUXXAN! TCHUXXAN!

GO GO GO!

AS TCHUXXAN LAY DYING, HE UTTERED HIS LAST WORDS TO TCHLUSARUD.

I'LL NEVER KNOW WHAT WAS SAID.

KNOWING WHAT I KNOW ***NOW,*** IT'S POSSIBLE...EVEN ***LIKELY...*** THAT, RATHER THAN PLEADING FOR A ***QUICK DEATH,*** TCHUXXAN ***TAUNTED*** HIS BROTHER ***ONE LAST TIME.***

BUT I DOUBT IT.

...NEVER SEEN SUCH AN ACT OF *COWARDICE* IN MY WHOLE DAMN *LIFE!*

YOU *SUCK,* REY! WE HAD THAT MOTHERLOVER *DEAD SOLID COLD* -- AND YOU TURNED *AWAY!*

THAT WAS THE REPTAUR WHO *KILLED WHILTS,* YOU STUPID *S.O.B.!*

WE *ALL* WANTED A PIECE OF HIM FOR WHAT HE--

WE ALL *DESERVED* A PIECE OF HIM! OR DID YOU *FORGET* THAT?

MAYBE HE NEEDS TO BE *REMINDED,* HUH?

WHAT *ABOUT* IT, *YELLOW?* YOU NEED TO BE *REMINDED?*

CAN'T *WAIT* TO RAT YOU OUT TO *GRANNART,* YOU *LOSER!* HE'LL BUST YOU *GOOD!*

WHADDAYA GOT T'*SAY* FOR YOURSELF, BIG MAN? HUH? *HUH?*

NOTHIN'? 'COURSE, NOTHIN'! THERE AIN'T NO *DEFENSE* FOR SPITTIN' ON WHILTS' *GRAVE IS* THERE? *IS THERE?!*

I SWEAR, WE OUGHTTA--

--SHUT THE HELL UP!

YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT *STUPID,* FARQUAR--

--LET'S START WITH *YOU!*

ME?

WERE YOU *THERE,* SINTOR?

YOU *LISTEN* TO *ME,* YOU *IDIOTS!* YOU'RE *ROLLING OVER* ON THE MAN WHO KEPT YOU *ALIVE* BACK THERE!

EVERYONE LOVED WHILTS. *EVERYONE* WANTED BLOOD!

BUT IN CASE YOU DIDN'T *NOTICE,* WE WERE AT A *%*@#! WATERFALL!*

IN CASE YOU DIDN'T *NOTICE,* THE RIVER WAS *WAY* TOO FAST TO *CROSS!*

WE COULDA--

AND EVEN IF YOU'D *TRIED* IT, WHATEVER CREATURES LIVE *IN* THAT RIVER WOULD HAVE HAD YOU FOR *LUNCH!*

AND *EVEN* HAD YOU *MADE* IT, BY THE TIME *THAT* BATTLE WAS *OVER*--

--DO YOU *HONESTLY THINK* THE ROYAL MATRIARCH WHO RETREATED SO *IMMEDIATELY* WOULDN'T RIGHT THIS SECOND BE SENDING AN *ARMY* TO GREET YOU AND GUN YOU *DOWN?*

SAMANDAHL REY GOT US OFF TCHARUN *ALIVE. PERIOD.* EAT *THAT*-- AND KEEP YOUR *MOUTH* CLOSED WHILE YOU'RE *CHEWING.*

IT WAS A GOOD *SPEECH.* DID THE *JOB.* NO ONE SAID A *WORD* THE REST OF THE WAY *HOME.*

PROBLEM *WAS,* EVEN THOUGH *I* KNEW I WAS RIGHT, THERE WAS NOBODY TO CALM *ME* DOWN.

I WAS *STILL* WORKED UP.

YES, SAM MADE THE RIGHT CALL. YES, HIS DETACHED NATURE, HIS COLDNESS, SAVED US *ALL*--

--BUT WITHOUT *ONE* REGRET?

WITHOUT *ONE CROSS WORD* FOR THAT SAURIAN *BASTARD?*

GOOD LORD -- HOW COLD *WAS* THAT MAN?

BY THE TIME WE WERE BACK AT ***HEADQUARTERS,*** I'D DECIDED -- FIELD COMMANDER OR ***NO*** -- TO GIVE SAM A PIECE OF MY ***MIND.***

I HAD TO KNOW ONCE AND FOR ***ALL...***

...HOW COULD HE ***NOT CARE*** ABOUT WHILTS?

HOW COULD HE HAVE THAT SMALL A ***SOUL?***

HOW --

YOUR POINT *BEING...?*

THAT WHEN PEOPLE CALL SAM *INSCRUTABLE,* IT'S REALLY NOT A *COMPLIMENT?*

THAT WE *REALLY* NEED SOME *PLASMA WEAPONS?*

THAT THE NEXT TIME SAM TEASES YOU BY FEEDING HALF A CRUNCHPUFF TO THE *PSEUDOSAUR,* YOU'RE GOING TO PLUNGE OUR SHIP INTO A *WHITE DWARF STAR?*

NO. NO.

YES.

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WELL?

HIGHER. WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR, AGAIN?

THE *GAMMA SENSORS*. PICTURE A CLUSTER OF *RIDGED METAL TUBING*.

I BET YOU SAY THAT TO *ALL* THE GIRLS.

GOT IT. POUR ON THE *JUICE* SO I CAN SOLID UP AND I'LL MAKE THE *ADJUSTMENTS*.

ROIYA SINTOR
Birth Planet: UNKNOWN

[illegible]

THERE. DONE AND *DONE*. TELL SAM AND ZANNI I CAN MEET *UP* WITH THEM NOW.

THEY'RE GONNA NEED ALL THE HELP THEY CAN *GET* RUNNING THE GANTLET PAST THE SULTAN'S *ASSASSINS*. COMING?

I HAVE SOME FINAL *TWEAKS* TO MAKE. IF ZANNI AND I ARE GOING TO *"BORROW"* THE SULTAN'S SHIP TO GET TO *GAIA*, I WANT ITS CLOAKING CAPACITY *DOUBLED*-- AT *LEAST*.

JeMERIK MEER
Birth Planet: UNKNOWN

No personal details databased; has demonstrated a broad base of knowledge and an aptitude for navigation

...SHOULD BE THERE ANY **SECOND**, SAM. YOU'RE SURE YOU DON'T **NEED** ME?

YOU'RE STILL HALF A CITY **AWAY**...

NO THANKS, 'MEER. THE BIGGER THE ***CROWD***, THE FATTER THE ***TARGET***, RIGHT?

'SIDES, I THINK WE'RE ABOUT TO BE ON THE ***MOVE***. ZANNI, YOU GOT A GOOD GRIP ON THE FTL DRIVE? READY TO ***ROLL?***

ZANNIATI SUZZATTA
Birth Planet: DELASKIA

Infiltrated/escaped harem of SULTAN RONOLO [cross-ref]
escorted from Tanipal by SAMANDAHL REY [cross-ref]

ON YOUR ***SIGNAL***.

WE REALLY HAVE ***NO CHOICE*** BUT TO TAKE RONOLO'S ***OWN SHIP?***

THINK OF IT AS A ***DIVORCE SETTLEMENT***.

HOW AMUSING.

LOOK, AFTER THIS MORNING'S ***SAURIAN ATTACK***, IT'S THE ONLY SHIP LEFT ***STANDIN'***.

WHAT ABOUT ***YOURS?***

YEAH, IT'S A ***BEAUT***, ALL RIGHT...

SAMANDAHL REY
Birth Planet: GAIA

Former Union commando; recently branded with a bi-colored sigil granting Rey a variety of supernormal abilities.

"...BUT THAT'S JUST WHERE RONOLO'S *ASSASSINS* WOULD *EXPECT* US T' GO...

"...WHICH IS WHY IT'S ONE OF THE PLACES I SENT YOUR *SOLDIERS* A COUPLE HOURS BACK..."

NO ACTIVITY *DETECTED,* SIR! SHIP IS *CLEAN!*

THEN ALL WE NEED *HERE* IS A *SKELETON CREW.* GIVE ME THREE VOLUNTEERS! COUNT OFF!

ONE!

TWO!

THREE!

THE REST OF US WILL TAKE POINT GUARDING THE *PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE!*

VOLUNTEERS FORM A *TIGHT PERIMETER!* NO ONE GETS *THROUGH*-- *NO* ONE! IS THAT *CLEAR?*

AS *GLASS,* SIR!

AND THEY'RE *OFF...*

"*AS GLASS, SIR.*" MAN, WHO DIED AND LEFT *YOU* IN CHARGE?

FFTT FFTT

YOU DID.

DEET DEET DEET

Telepathic Compulink ENGAGED

Enter Pilot Name

Downloading NAVIGATIONAL INTERFACE PROGRAMMING to GOD...

Access all recorded data, God? [y/n]

TAK TAK TAK

GOD

WHY, *YES*. IT *NEVER* HURTS TO KNOW THE *ENEMY*. AND ON *SECOND* THOUGHT, NO NEED TO BE SO *FORMAL*.

YOU MAY CALL ME *SULTAN*.

ROIYA SINTOR
Birth Planet: BREJHUR
Former Union commando; now a sentient hologram; friend to SAMANDAHL REY [crossref]

JoMERIK MEER
Birth Planet: UNKNOWN
No personal details databased; has demonstrated a broad base of knowledge and an aptitude for navigation

ZANNIATI ORIBATTA
Birth Planet: DELASSIA
infiltrated/escaped haren of SULTAN RONOLO [crossref]; escorted from Tanipal by SAMANDAHL REY [crossref]

SAMANDAHL REY
Birth Planet: GAIA
Former Union commando; recently branded with a bi-colored sigil granting Rey a variety of supernormal abilities.

"BITTERLUCK"
Owner: SAMANDAHL REY
Impervious to all known artillery; nearspace-warp capacity

Name change PROCESSING...

Download 15%

AND I'LL BE ABLE TO *PILOT* THIS... *SPACE WHALE* ONCE DOWNLOAD IS *COMPLETE?*

That is correct.

THEN DUMP *FASTER.* I WASTED *ENOUGH* TIME INFILTRATING THE *GUARD UNIT.* AND BY THE *WAY,* UNDER YOUR *ZANNI* REPORTAGE, YOU LEFT OUT *"TRAITOROUS INGRATE."*

NOT ONLY DOES MY EX-BRIDE INTEND TO DELIVER TO THE PLANETARY UNION A PROTOTYPE *WARPDRIVE* SO *POWERFUL* THAT IT WILL *ELIMINATE MY* WORLD AS A CRUCIAL UNION *WAYSTATION--*

--BUT SHE--

BLASTED *WOUND...THANK* YOU, SAMANDAHL *REY...*

--BUT SHE'S *ALREADY* PUT ME UNDER A UNION *MICROSCOPE* BY CLAIMING TO POSSESS EVIDENCE OF MY... *LOW-PROFILE* NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SAURIANS.

AAAAGHH!

SAURIANS

Native Planet: TCHARUN

An aggressive race of reptilian omnivores--

I *KNOW* WHO THE SAURIANS *ARE,* YOU LUMBERING *BEHEMOTH.*

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THIS *REY* CHARACTER.

Accessing...

SAMANDAHL REY [detail]

Sigil brand on chest confers molecular control over inorganic matter...

ROIYA'S IN PLACE. WHAT *WEAPON* ARE YOU USING?

BARE FIST.

JUST GONNA *GLOVE UP* FIRST...

HI, SAILOR! *NEW* IN TOWN?

?

KLUD

WELL, AT LEAST HE WENT DOWN ***HAPPY***. I DON'T SUPPOSE HE'LL BE NEEDING THIS ***GUN***...

THEN AGAIN, I'M NOT SURE HE ***EVER*** NEEDED IT. SAM, IF YOUR POWER SHIELDS YOU FROM ***GUNFIRE,*** CAN'T YOU JUST TURN IT ON FULL AND SIMPLY ***CARRY*** ME TO THE SHIP?

SURE, IF YOU DON'T MIND ***GLOWIN' IN THE DARK***. WHY D'YOU THINK I PULLED OUT THESE ***STEALTH SUITS*** IN THE ***FIRST*** PLACE?

I JUST FIGURED YOU WERE DRUMMING UP ***TEAM SPIRIT***. YOU WANT ***ME*** TO HOLO-SHIFT INTO ONE? I HAVEN'T *"CHANGED"* INTO ANYTHING THAT ***UGLY*** IN A ***WHILE,*** BUT IF YOU'RE WILLING TO ***BEG*** A LITTLE, I--

ARE YOU STILL TALKIN'?

P.S.--AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO REMEMBERS THERE'S ***TWO MORE GOONS*** OUT THERE--

--AN' THAT AT LEAST ONE OF 'EM IS TOTIN' AN ***ENERGY WEAPON*** THAT C'N CUT ME IN ***HALF?***

TRUST ME, Z-- ***LOW PROFILE***. DURING MY ***MILITARY DAYS,*** I LEARNED MORE THAN MY SHARE OF ***STEALTH TECHNIQUES.***

SINCE WHEN IS DRIVING THE GENERAL'S STAFF CAR THROUGH A CROWD OF ***NUNS*** A ***STEALTH TECHNIQUE?***

THEY WERE ***ENEMY*** NUNS, AND NO ONE ***ASKED*** YOU.

LUCKY FOR US, AT LEAST *I* PASSED GUERILLA TRAINING ON MY FIRST TRY. SO WHEN ARE YOU GONNA TELL ***ZANNI?***

THAT I FLUNKED ***COMMANDO?***

NO, YOU MORON. THAT YOU ***LOVE*** HER.

I--I--

--Oh, YOU'RE SO FULLA--

Oh, ***RELAX.*** I'M PROUD OF YOU FOR LETTING HER ***IN.*** YOU KEEP PEOPLE AT SUCH A ***DISTANCE,*** SAM.

I DO?

WELL, SPEAKING AS YOUR ***ONLY FRIEND,*** I'D HAVE TO SAY "*DUH.*" JUST...SAM, DON'T SCREW THIS UP.

I'M NOT... I...THERE'S NOTHING ***TO...***

...I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T ***LIKE*** ZANNI.

NOT ***IMPORTANT.*** YOU ***DO.*** KNOW ***WHY?*** SHE REMINDS YOU OF ***COQUELLE.*** FROM ***XANAPOOR.***

THE GIRL WITH THE ***HAIR*** AND THE...?

NO.

YEAH?

AND WE ***ALL*** REMEMBER HOW YOU BOBBLED ***THAT*** BALL. THAT'S ALL I'M SAYING. ***SOME*** OF US ***LEARN*** FROM OUR MISTAKES.

WHAT ARE YOU TWO GOING ***ON*** ABOUT?

NOTHING.

HI, SAILOR...!

Download 59%

YOU'RE *JOKING*. WHERE DID A NEANDERTHAL LIKE *REY OBTAIN* SUCH POWER?

HOW COULD IT *POSSIBLY* BE IN THE HANDS OF SOMEONE WHO SO *OBVIOUSLY* HAS *NO* IDEA HOW TO PROPERLY *PARLAY* IT?

SAMANDAHL REY [detail]

While skirmishing with Saurian enemies on the planet Tanipal, Rey was confronted by a stranger of indeterminate origin who, with a touch--

--branded the power-sigil onto subject's chest and--

STOP. LET ME UNDERSTAND THIS. THIS HAPPENED ON *MY WORLD*... SOMEONE THERE WAS GRANTED *THIS LEVEL OF POWER*...

...AND IT WASN'T *ME*?

WHOSE OVERSIGHT *WAS* THAT?

Data unavailable.

⇒SIGH⇐

Download 72%

VERY WELL. TELL ME ABOUT THIS "*ROIYA*." SHE'S A *SPECTER* OF SOME SORT...?

ROIYA SINTOR [detail]

During the skirmish [crossref], Sintor was slain by a Saurian warrior only moments after Rey received his sigil.

Though he was as yet unaware of its potential, his overwhelming grief nevertheless caused it to emit an explosive energy...

...which put a decisive end to the battle.

[more]

ROIYA SINTOR [detail] [continued]

Shortly thereafter, said energy was presumed to have merged Sintor's consciousness with selfship's computers...

...enabling Sintor to manifest her mental essence inside a mobile holographic construct.

"THAT'S...DISTURBING. I IMAGINE HER *CORPSE* IS ROLLING OVER IN ITS *GRAVE*."

Negative. Sintor's carbonform remains aboard this ship in stasis until such time as a reunion of body and mind can be engineered.

YOU DON'T *SAY.*

Download 100%

YOU'VE PROVEN QUITE THE *HEADACHE,* SAMANDAHL REY. WHEN YOU PROVIDED ZANNIATI *PASSAGE* FROM *TANIPAL*...

...YOU TOOK SOMETHING OF TREMENDOUS IMPORTANCE *AWAY* FROM ME.

I THINK IT'S TIME TO RETURN THE *FAVOR*...

GREAT. THE ASSASSINS SAVED THE ***BEST*** FOR ***LAST.***

THAT OLD ***STARSHIP*** IN OUR PATH IS ***PERFECT COVER*** FOR GUNMAN NUMBER ***THREE***--

--SO, NATURALLY, ***HE'S*** GOTTA BE THE ONE SPORTIN' THE ***BANGSTROM 3000.*** ROI LOOKED IT ***UP*** FOR ME AFTER I DESCRIBED IT.

THAT'S THE FIREARM THAT WOUNDED YOU ***EARLIER?*** WHAT DOES IT ***DO*** EXACTLY?

FIRES ***CONCUSSIVE ENERGY SHELLS*** THAT REV UP THE TARGET'S MOLECULES TILL THEY GO ***BOOM.***

IT'S LIKE A ***MICROWAVE*** WITH A ***SCOPE*** AND A ***TRIGGER.*** IF HE'S REALLY LAYIN' IN ***WAIT*** WITH IT--

HE ***IS.*** I JUST SNUCK A ***PEEK.*** CAN WE CALL IN ***REINFORCEMENTS...*** WAIT HIM ***OUT?***

SOUNDS LIKE OUR BEST BET.

I BEG TO ***DIFFER.*** ***LOOK.***

HEY! THERE HE ***IS,*** WEAPON AND ***ALL.***

BUT I ***KNOW*** HE HASN'T ***SEEN*** US, SO WHAT'S HE ***AIMING...***

...AT...?

AW, NO. ***NO!*** HE WANTS T' SMOKE US ***OUT--***

"--BY SHOOTIN' UP *BYSTANDERS!*"

ALL RIGHT!
ALL *RIGHT,* DAMN IT!
YOU WIN!

NO, SAM! DON'T PUT *YOURSELF* IN HIS SIGHTS! THAT'S WHAT HE *WANTS!*

ZANNI, I *GOTTA* DRAW HIS *FIRE! WORK* WITH ME! I CAN *DISTRACT* HIM...BUT HERE'S WHAT I NEED *YOU* T' DO...

BIG BRAVE MAN! YOU WANNA GUN SOMEBODY DOWN--

--BRING IT ON!

ZANNI, RUN! GET TO THE SHIP! GET TO THE SHIP!

GET TO THE--

HNNGGHHH!

GOTCHA. YOU KNOW *WHAT*, THOUGH?

THAT "*RUNNING RIGHT TOWARDS ME*" BIT? YOU DON'T STRIKE ME AS *THAT STUPID*. YOU WERE TRYING TO BUY THE *GIRL* TIME ENOUGH TO GET *PAST* ME.

KNOW WHAT *ELSE?*

YOU *FAILED.*

♫♫♫

♫♫♫

Oh, MAN...

...I *LOVE* IT WHEN THEY *RUN.*

SUCKER.

?

WHAT THE--?

DON'T WORRY, DEAR.

I JUST TOOK A LITTLE OFF THE *TOP*.

WAIT! IF SHE'S THE *HOLO*, THEN --

HI, SAILOR. ARE YOU NEW?

FWAM

"NEW IN TOWN."

WHATEVER.

NICE BIT OF *STRATEGY*. *YOU* THOUGHT OF THAT?

I HAVE MY MOMENTS, C'MON.

...GONE *OVER* THIS, SAM. YOU *CAN'T* GO WITH ME. I'LL BE *FINE* WITH *JeMERIK*.

FOR ALL WE KNOW, THE SAURIANS ARE EVEN *NOW* PLANNING A *SECOND ATTACK*. YOU'RE DELASSIA'S *ONLY DEFENSE*. YOU *MUST* STAY.

YEAH, BUT--

I CERTAINLY *WISH* Y-- Oh, I'M SORRY, YOU WERE GOING TO *SPEAK*--?

I...NO, NOTHIN'.

THEN--

I MEAN, NOT...*REALLY*. Nah.

GO *AHEAD*, SAM. IF YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL ME, I...I *WANT* TO HEAR IT. I'M *LISTENING*.

I...JUST WANTED TO SAY... WELL...

...DRIVE *SAFE*.

"DRIVE SAFE."

Mm-hmm.

DRIVE.

SAFE.

DRIVE--?

WHAT? *WHAT?*

I--I--

--I--

Oh, *HELL*...

COME BACK *SOON*, ZAN. TAKE *CARE* OF HER, 'MEER.

WE'LL FEE BINE--

--BE--

"BE *FINE*."

--BE *FINE*. I *PROMISE*.

GOODBYE, SAM.

'BYE.

NOT BAD.

FOR A NIGHT'S WORK? S'POSE. 'COURSE, WE STILL GOTTA GATHER UP THE ***GUNMEN*** BEFORE THEY WAKE UP-- PLUS, WE GOTTA FIND THE SULTAN--

I MEANT NOT BAD WITH ***ZANNI,*** KNOTHEAD.

THERE MAY BE HOPE FOR YOU ***YET.*** AT THE VERY ***LEAST,*** I'D SAY YOUR LUCK'S FINALLY CHANGED FOR THE ***BETTER.***

Y' DON'T ***SAY.*** OKAY...

...THEN WHY AM I WATCHIN' ***MY OWN SHIP TAKE OFF?***

ROI! OVER *HERE!* FOUND THE *GUARDS!*

ONE'S *GONE,* BUT THE OTHER'S STILL *MOVING!* CALL A *MEDSQUAD! HURRY!*

HANG ON, SOLDIER, HELP'S ON THE *WAY!* WHAT *HAPPENED* HERE?

NOT... *SURE.* SHOT... FROM *BEHIND...*

DON'T... DON'T KNOW... *WHO...*

I DO.

ROI? WHAT IS IT? WHAT'RE YOU *LOOKIN'* AT?

SEE FOR *YOURSELF,* SAM. YOU OUGHT TO *RECOGNIZE* IT.

DEAR SAM—
THE NOTED POWER OF RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF A GOOD TRADE
WARMEST REGARDS,
RONALD

IT'S MY *COFFIN...*

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NOW, SHE'S ***REALLY DEAD?***

Female carbonform ROIYA SINTOR is CHEMICALLY INERT.

NO. CAPITAL "D" ***DEAD.***

AS IN, *"SHE'S NOT JUST IN A **COMA** AND SUDDENLY GOING TO RISE FROM HER **COFFIN** AND **KNIFE** ME WHEN MY **GUARD** IS DOWN"* DEAD. *DEAD?*

Carbonform holds ZERO PERCENT LIFE ESSENCE.

I CAN'T *TELL* YOU WHAT A *COMFORT* THAT IS.

UNDERSTAND, FOR A ***STARSHIP,*** YOU'VE DEMONSTRATED A ***GIFT*** FOR MATTERS ***ROBOMEDICAL.*** MY ***HAND,*** FOR INSTANCE, IS AS GOOD AS ***NEW,*** THANK YOU.

I JUST WANT TO BE ASSURED THAT ***REVIVIFICATION*** OF THE ***DECEASED*** IS ***BEYOND*** YOUR PROGRAMMING.

Affirmative.

EXCELLENT. BECAUSE IF WE CAN INTERCEPT MY EX-WIFE'S ***SHIP*** IN ***MID-VOYAGE,*** WELL, THEN...

...WE'RE GOING TO BE STACKING UP ***CORPSES*** LIKE ***GAMING CHIPS*** AROUND HERE...

"...MUCH TO THE DISMAY OF A CERTAIN FECKLESS THUG NAMED--"

SAM--!

--SAM, WHAT DOES HE--

--WHAT COULD HE HAVE BEEN--

--WHY WOULD THE SULTAN--

--SAM, HE'S--

SAM, SAY *SOMETHING. PLEASE.* THIS IS--

--*MY FAULT.* IT'S *MY FAULT,* ROI.

THAT'S WHAT MAKES THIS SO *SICK*... THAT IT'S GOT NOTHIN' TO *DO* WITH *YOU.*

RONOLO HATES *ME* FOR HELPING ZANNI GET OUT FROM... *UNDER* HIM.

YOU'RE JUST *PAYBACK.* I TAKE AWAY SOMEONE IMPORTANT TO *HIM*...

"...HE DOES *TWICE* THE *SAME.* NOT ONLY DOES HE HAVE *YOU,* BUT..."

...BUT... OH, *NO*...BUT A *BILLION CREDS* SAYS *ZANNI'S* LIVING ON *BORROWED TIME* NOW THAT HE CAN *TAIL* HER!

THREE BIRDS WITH *ONE STONE,* SAM-- AND THERE'S *NOTHING WE CAN DO!*

WE'RE *GROUNDED!*

WE'RE *STUCK* HERE ON THIS *STUPID BACKNEBULA MUDBALL* AND WE'RE...

.WE'RE *HELPLESS*...

HEY.

HEY. ROI, IT'LL BE *OKAY.* C'MERE...

FOR *WHAT?* A *HUG?* SO YOU CAN *HOLD* ME? THINK *AGAIN!*

I'M NOT *FLESH AND BLOOD* ANYMORE, SAM. AND NOW WE HAVE *NO CHANCE* OF EVER *FIXING* THAT.

EVER.

WE HAVE *EVERY* CHANCE... *IF* WE CAN FIND A *SHIP.* LET'S START *LOOKING.*

OKAY.

THERE.

YOU'RE *KIDDING.*

NOPE. *SOMEBODY'S* SMILING DOWN AT US, SAM. HOW OFTEN HAVE WE CAUGHT A BREAK LIKE *THIS?*

COUNTING THE *NEXT* TIME?

TWICE.

THINK WE CAN TURN THIS INTO A *LOANER?*

SHOULDN'T TAKE MUCH *SELLIN'*. IT'S NOT JUST *YOU* AND *ZANNI* IN THE CROSSHAIRS.

IF WE DON'T STOP *RONOLO,* THE WHOLE *PLANETARY UNION* BECOMES *CLUB SAURIAN.*

WHOEVER *OWNS* THIS CRATE WILL *ABSOLUTELY* UNDERSTAND...

SAMANDAHL REY...

...I COME IN *PEACE.*

...THAT...

TCHLUSARUD?

GESUNDHEIT.

DON'T TIE YOUR TONGUE IN A ***KNOT.*** HE'S NOT ***WORTH*** IT. CALL HIM WHAT I DO:

"LOSER."

AN EPITHET MORE FITTING THAN YOU ***REALIZE.*** HEAR ME ***OUT,*** REY. I--

NNNGGHH!

I... ⇒GASP⇐ ...I COME WITH... ⇒HHHHUH⇐ ...WITH ***PURPOSE...***

IF IT'S TO HELP ME LET OFF ***STEAM,*** REMIND ME TO THANK YOUR NEXT OF ***KIN.***

ANY LAST ***WORDS,*** YOU ARROGANT PIECE OF CRAWLING ***STENCH?***

JUST THESE:

HELP ME.

I *CONFUSE* YOU...BUT THIS IS NO *RUSE*.

I TRUST YOU NO MORE THAN YOU TRUST *ME*...YET IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE MY *SINCERITY,* I APPROACHED YOU WITH *TOTAL VULNERABILITY.*

RELEASE ME AND I VOW YOU *NO HARM.*

HIS SHIP'S *EMPTY,* SAM. THERE'S NO *AMBUSH* WAITING FOR US. I SAY WE HEAR HIM *OUT.*

AND *THEN* TAKE HIS SHIP.

NO!

YOU'RE MAKING *DEMANDS?* HE'S MAKING *DEMANDS.*

MOCK ME IF YOU *WISH,* SAMANDAHL RÉY. WE WILL *SEE* HOW HARD YOU ARE *LAUGHING* ONCE I *FINISH* MY TALE.

MERE *DAWNCYCLES* AGO, THE GODDESS *KHYALHTUA* APPEARED BEFORE HE WHOM YOU KNOW AS THE *WEAPONSMASTER*-- MY *MENTOR*--

"--GIFTING HIM WITH A NEWFOUND LEVEL OF *POWER*--

"--ONE SO *IMMENSE*, SO BARELY BEYOND *CONTAINMENT*, THAT IT ALTERED BOTH HIS *FLESH*--

"--AND, I FEAR-- HIS *MIND*."

MASTER, ARE YOU--?

--*WORTHY* OF THIS *HONOR*? A *FOOL'S* QUESTION.

LEADING OUR RACE TO *MAGNIFICENCE* HAS FOREVER BEEN MY *DREAM*. NOW...

...NOW IT IS MY *RESPONSIBILITY*. FROM THIS DAY *FORTH*, I AM *DESTINY INCARNATE*.

I AM *KHYRADON*--

--AND I AM YOUR *SAVIOR!*

"WITH THAT, HE LED ME TO THE *ROYAL PALACE*--

"--THERE, I PRESUMED, TO CHART A *LEADERSHIP STRATEGY* WITH THE *ROYAL FAMILY* OF OUR WORLD.

"I MYSELF HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN *BANISHED* FROM THE PALACE, HAVING BEEN ACCUSED OF *QUESTIONABLE JUDGMENT*. AT THE TIME, I *ARGUED* THAT CHARGE.

"NO MORE."

VISITOR, *HALT!*

ALREADY YOU SHAME YOURSELF BY KEEPING COMPANY WITH THE *EXILED* ONE!

DO NOT *COMPOUND* YOUR SIN BY ASSUMING *FREE PASSAGE* BEYOND THIS POINT!

MASTER...?

ALL IS *WELL*, TCHLUSARUD. ALLOW ME TO *REPEAT* MYSELF.

I AM *KHYRADON*, YOU SIGHTLESS *HEATHENS*--

--AND I AM HERE TO *SAVE* YOU!

AAAARRGH!

THE *DOORS*--!

"I HAD SPENT MY *LIFETIME* IN MY MENTOR'S COMPANY.

"OVER *DECADES,* I HAD COME TO KNOW HIM *WELL.*

"IN AN *INSTANT,* HE HAD BECOME A *STRANGER.* STILL, PERHAPS-- I PRAYED--

"--PERHAPS THIS WAS ALL MERELY A *TEST.* PERHAPS HE WAS GRANTING ME THE *OPPORTUNITY*--"

YOU! WHO *ARE* YOU? YOU SEEM *FAMILIAR*--YET I DOUBT I WOULD EVER HAVE WASTED MY *TIME* ON ANYONE IDIOTIC ENOUGH TO CONSORT WITH THE *LEAST* OF MY *SONS!*

"--TO *REDEEM* MYSELF BEFORE MY *MOTHER* AND MY *BROTHERS.*"

MASTER, *STOP.* THIS HAS GONE *TOO FAR.*

DO NOT MAKE ME --

*

"I WAS MISTAKEN."

MOTHER, *RUN! WE* WILL PROTECT YOU!

FROM *WHAT?*

NYAAAGH!

AIEEEE—*

FROM TOMORROW'S *GREATNESS?* FROM TOMORROW'S *GLORY?*

FROM TOMORROW'S *GOD?*

SNAP

"IT WAS DONE. MY BROTHERS WERE *DEAD*— AND AS FOR MY *MOTHER,* NO MATTER HOW QUICKLY SHE HAD FOUND *SANCTUARY* SOMEWHERE IN THE *PALACE*—

"—IT COULD NOT HAVE *SAVED* HER.

NHAROON

I WANT TO OFFER MY *CONDOLENCES.*

THEN I REMEMBER THE TIME SHE HAD ME *CAPTURED* AND *TORTURED,* AND I GOTTA *SAY...*

...I HAVEN'T HEARD *ANYTHING* YET THAT DOESN'T MAKE ME WANT TO *DANCE.* ROI, TELL THE *LOCALS* WHERE THEY CAN FIND *LOSER* AFTER WE *TAKE OFF.*

DO. TELL THEM TO *KILL* ME SO I CAN ESCAPE *THEIR* FATE.

"WHAT?"

"I HAVE NOT *FINISHED* MY STORY..."

FACE ME, TCHLUSARUD. I HAVE KEPT YOU *ALIVE* FOR A *REASON.*

LONG HAVE YOU BEEN MY *DISCIPLE.* I SEE NO REASON FOR THAT TO *CHANGE.*

MASTER... THE ⇒*KOFF*⇐ *PALACE...*

...WHY...?

BECAUSE I WAS GRANTED GODHOOD FOR A *REASON.*

FOR *CENTURIES,* THE *ROYAL FAMILY* HAS BEEN UNABLE TO WIN OUR WAR AGAINST THE *HUMANS.* AND *WHY?*

BECAUSE THEIR WAY LACKED *DISCIPLINE...*

...WHILE *MY* WAY *DEFINES* THE WORD.

KHYALHTUA KNEW THIS. SHE KNEW ONLY *I* COULD LEAD OUR PEOPLE. TODAY, THE SAURIAN RACE BEGINS ITS *VICTORY MARCH.* WE WILL REDUCE OUR OPPOSITION TO *CINDERS* --

-- BEGINNING WITH THE PLANET *DELASSIA.*

HERE.

YES. *RETRIBUTION* FOR THE WAY YOU *YOURSELF* SAVAGED THE *SAURIAN WARFLEET.*

KHYRADON IS *INSANE.* MY PEOPLE ARE IN THE HANDS OF A *MADMAN.* THE ONLY BEING *ALIVE* WHO CAN MATCH HIS *POWER* IS *YOU.*

WE BOTH NEED HIM *STOPPED...* AND THAT IS WHY I HAVE *COME:*

TO PROPOSE AN *ALLIANCE.*

I...

THOUGHTS? YOU'RE *NEVER* SHY WITH AN *OPINION.*

DO I BUY HIS *STORY?* I HAVE NO IDEA. DOES IT *MATTER?* RIGHT NOW, *NO.*

LIAR OR *NOT,* LOSER HAS THE ONLY WORKING SHIP ON THE *PLANET--*

-- AND EVERY SECOND WE *DEBATE* THIS PUTS US FURTHER BEHIND *RONOLO.*

WHAT DO YOU MEAN *"ALLIANCE"?* WHY TAKE *YOU?* WHY CAN'T I JUST GIVE YOU A *SKULLECTOMY* AND BE *DONE* WITH IT?

BECAUSE YOU REQUIRE *ACCESS CODES* TO PILOT MY *SHIP.*

IF THIS IS A *TRICK...*

...YOU'RE *DEAD.*

CONCENTRATE.

THAT'S IT. EASY... *EASY*...

'KAY. LIKE YOU *SAID*...I'M PICTURING SOMETHIN' IN MY *MIND*...HEAVY ON THE *DETAIL*...

I SEEM T'REMEMBER THIS PLACE FROM... WHERE?

BREJHUR?

YOU *WOULD*.

WHAT WAS IT, AGAIN?

A *BROTHEL*.

KSSSSH

OH, WAY TO *GO*, COACH.

BREAK YOUR TRAIN OF *THOUGHT*, DID I?

THIS IS... IS...AAA*ARRRGH*. ROI, IT'S HARD ENOUGH TURNIN' *BUILDINGS* INTO *BOULDERS*. THIS LEVEL OF *FINE-TUNING*...

HELL, I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND EXACTLY HOW THIS POWER *WORKS*.

IT JUST *DOES*, OKAY?

NO. SLEDGEHAMMERS ARE *GOOD*, SAM, BUT SO ARE *SCALPELS*.

THE MORE *CONTROL* YOU HAVE OVER THIS WHAMMY, THE MORE EFFECTIVE YOU'LL BE IN *BATTLE*.

BESIDES, I DON'T WANT TO *SCARE* YOU, PAL... BUT BETWEEN WHAT YOU CAN *DO* WITH PARTICLE PHYSICS AND WHAT I *KNOW* ABOUT IT, BELIEVE ME...

...WE HAVEN'T EVEN *BEGUN* TO SEE WHAT YOU'RE *REALLY* CAPABLE OF.

YOU CAN MORPH *INORGANIC MATTER*. YOU CAN FLY THROUGH *SPACE* BY BUILDING AN *OXYGENATED FORCE-FIELD*. I THINK THAT'S JUST THE *SURFACE*.

Uh-huh. LISTEN, YOU WERE ALWAYS SMARTER'N ME, BUT BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU GO SURFIN' THROUGH COMPUTERS AN' STUFF, 'KAY?

BECAUSE?

BECAUSE YOU'RE STARTIN' T'SOUND LIKE ONE *YOURSELF*. SINCE WHEN ARE YOU A *PARTICLE PHYSICIST*?

OH.

Aaaah, LISTEN TO *ME*. WE'RE *BOTH* CHANGIN'.

IT'S *WEIRD*, ROI. I MEAN, I'D FINALLY GOTTEN TO WHERE I *WANTED* TO BE. SURE, I WASN'T EXACTLY LIVIN' IN *LUXURY*...

...BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE I CAN *REMEMBER*, MY LIFE WAS *TOTALLY MY OWN*.

NO ONE WAS *DEPENDIN'* ON ME FOR ANY-THING.

MY *FAMILY*...*CARYNNE* AND *HER* FOLKS... MY *PLATOON*...ALL IN THE *PAST*. *FINALLY*, I COULD STOP BEING *BURIED* IN *RESPONSIBILITY*.

DON'T GET ME *WRONG*... IT'S NOT LIKE I *RESENTED* TAKIN' CARE OF PEOPLE, BUT THE *PRESSURE*...IT JUST NEVER *STOPPED*.

SO NOW, JUST WHEN I THOUGHT ALL THAT WEIGHT WAS *GONE*...

...SUDDENLY THE WHOLE DAMN *PLANETARY UNION'S* COUNTIN' ON ME.

YAY.

I'M SORRY. DON'T LISTEN T'ME. I'M JUST *VENTING*. IF I CAN *HELP* SOME-WHERE, I *WILL*. *YOU* KNOW THAT.

I JUST WANT A LITTLE PEACE FOR *ME*. ME AND...

HEY, YOU'RE AWFULLY QUIET OVER THERE. YOU *OKAY*, PAL?

NO.

ROIYA!

TALK TO ME! WHY ARE YOU *FADING?* WHAT'S GOIN' *ON?*

LIKE I *KNOW?* SAM, *NO* ONE'S SURE JUST WHAT THE RELATIONSHIP IS BETWEEN THIS *HOLO-FORM* AND MY *PHYSICAL BODY* AND *YOUR SHIP* AND -- AND --

DISTANCE PLUS *TIME AWAY,* POSSIBLY? I'VE NEVER BEEN THIS FAR *REMOVED* FOR THIS *LONG...!*

COULD BE YOU'RE... *ADAPTING.* I'M *REACHING,* I KNOW, BUT STAY *CALM!* MAYBE IT'S JUST *TEMPORARY!*

WHAT IF IT *ISN'T,* SAM? *WHAT IF IT'S NOT?* WE *NEED* YOUR *SHIP BACK,* SAM! TELL LOSER TO MOVE *FASTER!*

IMPOSSIBLE-- BUT *UNNECESSARY.* I HAVE THE *BITTERLUCK* IN *VISUAL RANGE.*

GOOD *NEWS.*

NOT *COMPLETELY.*

SEE FOR *YOURSELF,* SAMANDAHL REY.

NOTE HOW *QUICKLY* IT CLOSES IN ON THE SMALLER CRAFT *AHEAD* OF IT. IS THAT--?

DAMN IT! IT'S *HER!*

HE'S GOT ZANNI *TARGETED--*

--AND WE'LL NEVER *INTERCEPT* IN *TIME!*

WE GOTTA *WARN* HER! RADIO! WHERE'S YOUR *RADIO?*

DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? WHICH ONE OF THESE IS--?

IT DOESN'T *MATTER!*

THE SULTAN IS BROADCASTING A *JAMMING FREQUENCY* TO PREVENT HIS PREY FROM CRYING FOR *HELP.*

"WE HAVE TO *OPEN FIRE!*"

Detecting SAURIAN SHIP in PURSUIT.

SAURIAN? ALL THE WAY OUT *HERE?* IN A *NEUTRAL ZONE?* WHY WOULD IT BE TRACKING *M--*

REY.

IMAGINE. HE ACTUALLY FOUND *TRANSPORTATION...*

...FOR WHATEVER GOOD IT WILL *DO* HIM. THE *SHIELDS* ON THIS SHIP ARE ABSOLUTELY *ASTOUNDING.*

TELL ME, ARE THOSE *PLASMA TORPEDOES* I HEAR?

Affirmative.

AH.

"FOR A MOMENT THERE, I THOUGHT IT WAS *RAINING.*"

WE'RE THROWIN' ***SPITBALLS!*** FIND ME SOMETHING ***ELSE!***

DON'T WE HAVE ***ANYTHING*** THAT CAN PENETRATE MY SHIP'S ***DEFENSES?***

YES. ***YOU.***

NOT THAT ***THAT*** MATTERS! HOW'M I SUPPOSED TO FLY FAST ENOUGH TO ***CATCH UP?***

YOU ***CANNOT. HOWEVER---***

-- I CAN ***LAUNCH*** YOU.

GREAT! LIKE A ***CARBON TORPEDO! HOORAY!*** LOSER, AT ***THAT*** SPEED, I HIT WITH ALL THE FINESSE OF A ***NUCLEAR WARHEAD!***

THE ***BITTERLUCK*** IS ROIYA'S ***LIFELINE!*** FORGET THE ***SULTAN---*** IF I VAPORIZE MY OWN ***SHIP, SHE*** FADES AWAY FOR ***GOOD!*** DID YOU THINK OF ***THAT?***

I DID. BUT AT ANY MOMENT, RONOLO WILL LAUNCH HIS ***OWN*** MISSILES AT THE TARGET CRAFT. ***ENERGY SALVOS.***

WHICH I CAN'T ***MORPH.***

THEN EITHER YOU DESTROY YOUR ***OWN*** SHIP ***BEFORE*** RONOLO OPENS FIRE --

"-- OR --"

"***SPARE*** ROIYA -- GUARANTEEING ***ZANNI'S*** DEATH. THOSE ARE YOUR ***ONLY TWO CHOICES,*** SAMANDAHL REY--

"--AND YOU ***KNOW*** IT."

THIS IS *WAR*, SAM. ANNI'S CARRYING OUR BEST AT *PEACE*.

I *LOVE* HER, YOU...

...YOU KNOW WHAT *HAVE* TO DO.

YEAH.

LAUNCH.

DROP SHIELDS AND *FIRE!*

GOOD BYE, ZANNI.

WARNING! Projectile of UNKNOWN ENERGY approa--

Correction: Projectile has course-corrected PAST selfship.

Vectoring towards TARGET SHIP.

...

WHAT?

SAM...?

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NO. THIS IS A *TRICK!*

SHIP, GIVE ME A *PROXIMITY READING* NOW NOW *NOW!*

Target ship DESTROYED by an UNKNOWN FORCE--

--NAMED *SAMANDAHL REY?* *FORGET* KILLING HIM FOR *REVENGE!* AS SOON AS WE GET TO *GAIA*--

--I'M PUTTING HIM ON THE *PAYROLL!*

CONTINUE COURSE AT *TOP SPEED!* WE'LL LEAVE OUR *PURSUIT* SHIP--

"--TO ITS *OWN* FATE!"

PIECES! WHY WOULD HE BLAST ZANNIATI'S SHIP TO *PIECES?*

I HAVE A MORE *PERTINENT* QUESTION:

WHY DIDN'T HE MAKE THOSE PIECES *SMALLER?*

BRACE FOR IMPACT!

"WAIT! IT'S NOT GOING TO *HIT* US! IT'S--

"--IT'S *LOCKING ON TO US--?*"

SKREEEEEUNNNK

THOOM

--SO I CAN CLOSE THE DOOR *BEHIND* ME! *OKAY*--

--WHO ORDERED THE *EXTRA LARGE?*

SAM?!

MOVE!

THE *HULL--!*

GOT A *PRESSURE SHIELD* ON IT! NOW *GET OUTTA MY WAY--*

WHAT?

KIDDING.

BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I DIDN'T *BRING* YOU ANYTHING.

...

SAM?

EASY! I GOTCHA! DROP THE WARPDRIVE, IT'S NOT GOIN' ANYWHERE! ***DEEP BREATHS...!***

LOSER, SET A COURSE FOR GAIA! NOW THAT RONOLO THINKS ZANNI'S ***DEAD,*** HE'LL HEAD ***STRAIGHT THERE!***

GRRR

JeMERIK, SEE IF YOU CAN BREAK THROUGH THE SULTAN'S ***JAMMING FREQUENCY!*** RADIO ***AHEAD*** TO LET 'EM KNOW WHAT HE'S ***DONE!***

SAM, WHAT ***DID*** HE DO? THERE WAS A ***FLASH*** OF ***LIGHT,*** THEN ***DARKNESS,*** THEN --

--THEN-- THEN WHAT? WHERE DID ***YOU*** COME FROM?

BELIEVE IT OR ***NOT...*** A ***TORPEDO TUBE.***

"THE ***SULTAN*** WAS ***RIGHT BEHIND*** YOU, ZANNI. HE'D ***OPENED FIRE,*** AND IF HE DIDN'T NAIL YOU WITH HIS ***FIRST*** ROUND, HE'D ***KEEP GUNNIN'*** UNTIL YOU WERE ***VAPORIZED.*** THAT LEFT ME ***ONE OPTION.***

"I HAD TO ***RACE*** HIS ***OPENING SALVO*** SO I COULD PULL YOUR SHIP APART ***MYSELF--***

"--CARVE OFF AND SEAL THE ***BRIDGE--***

"--AND PRAY LIKE ***HELL*** THAT YOU AND ***MEER*** WERE BOTH AT YOUR ***STATIONS.***"

THANKS FOR NOT GOING TO THE *BATHROOM.*

'KAY. WE MUST BE *GAINING* ON RONOLO AND MY SHIP, 'CAUSE I SEE ROIYA'S *STABILIZED.*

Umm... YEAH. *GAINING.* THAT'S IT.

YOUR DOING, I ASSUME?

YOU *KNOW* BY NOW YOU'RE SAFE WITH *ME.*

SAFER THAN *ZANNI,* I HOPE! YOU DIDN'T STEP IN BECAUSE...?

BECAUSE I SENSED SAM'S *APPROACH.* I WANTED TO GIVE HIM *EVERY CHANCE* TO *SAVE* US...AND HE DIDN'T LET ME *DOWN.*

I HAVE TO SAY, HE SEEMS TO BE COMING ALONG *QUITE NICELY.*

TCHLUSARUD? WHAT'S *THAT* FETID PIECE OF LIZARD FLESH DOING HERE?

IT'S...

=KOFF=

...IT'S *HIS SHIP.*

SPEAKING OF *WHICH,* HAVE WE MADE *CONTACT* WITH *UNION HQ* YET? WE *GOTTA* TELL 'EM WHAT'S GOIN' *ON* BEFORE--

CHOOM

CHOOM

--BEFORE THE SULTAN REPORTS A *SAURIAN CRAFT* IN PURSUIT.
CRAP.

THE SULTAN'S *LANDED*, BUT OUR SIGNAL'S STILL *BLOCKED!* HE MUST HAVE THE *BITTERLUCK* NARROWCASTING A STATIC INTERRUPT *RIGHT AT US!*

IT CAN *DO* THAT?

WHO *KNOWS* WHAT THAT SHIP'S FULLY CAPABLE OF? I'M WORKING *AROUND* IT!

WORK *FASTER!* IN THE MEANTIME, I'LL RUN INTERFERENCE!

AGAIN.

STAND *ASIDE, MAMMAL*. WE MUST CHART AN EVASIVE COURSE, AND I HAVEN'T TIME TO EDUCATE YOU ON THIS CRAFT'S *NAVIGATIONAL CONTROLS*.

DON'T *PATRONIZE* ME, YOU NOISOME *REPTAUR*. I WAS FLYING MORE SOPHISTICATED CRAFT THAN *THIS* WHEN YOU WERE STILL ON YOUR *BELLY*.

HEY! *EXCUSE* ME, *AMBASSADOR*, BUT FOR THE MOMENT, HE'S *ON OUR SIDE!* THAT *CHANGES*, WE TURN HIM INTO A *HANDBAG*-- BUT FOR *NOW* CAN WE CONCENTRATE ON THE *BIG* PICTURE?

THE *PLANETARY UNION WINS* OR *LOSES* THE SAURIAN WAR BASED ON THAT *WARPDRIVE* YOU'VE GOT WITH YOU. THAT MEANS WE *SUCK IT UP* AND DO *ANYTHING* AND *EVERYTHING* TO DELIVER IT *SAFELY* TO *UNION HQ* --

"--EVEN IF WE HAVE TO GO THROUGH THEIR *ENTIRE ARMY* TO *GET* THERE!"

I MUST *SAY*, MR. PRESIDENT...

...YOU CERTAINLY KNOW HOW TO MAKE YOUR GUESTS FEEL *PAMPERED*.

IT'S NOT *EVERY* DAY MY HOST GOES TO THE TROUBLE OF SWATTING A BOTHERSOME *GNAT* WITH A *BAZOOKA*.

WE SIMPLY RESPONDED TO YOUR *PLEA FOR HELP*, SULTAN RONOLO, IN THE MOST EXPEDIENT MANNER *POSSIBLE*.

REMEMBER, AS WE CEMENT OUR *ALLIANCE*, YOU AND I...

...THAT NOT EVEN A *ROGUE* UNION SPACECRAFT WOULD EVER THREATEN THE LEADER OF *TANIPAL*.

EVEN NOW, OUR *FINEST STARFIGHTERS* ARE UNLEASHING UPON YOUR SAURIAN PURSUER OUR MOST *SOPHISTICATED TACTICAL ARTILLERY*.

WHY, YOU CAN SEE THE *BLASTS* FROM *HERE*.

Umm... SIR...?

ACCORDING TO *TRANSMITTED REPORTS*... THOSE *EXPLOSIONS*...

...THEY'RE... WELL...THEY'RE NOT OUR *ARMAMENTS*.

"THEY'RE OUR *SHIPS*."

GOOD *GOD...!*

GENERAL, I DON'T KNOW WHAT SORT OF WEAPON THOSE SAURIAN CRETINS ARE ***USING*** UP THERE, BUT OUR ESTEEMED V.I.P. IS CLEARLY ITS ***TARGET!***

SULTAN RONOLO IS POTENTIALLY OUR ***SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ALLY!*** I AUTHORIZE YOU TO END THIS BATTLE ***NOW***--

--BY DISPATCHING ***ALL UNION FORCES!***

ALL RIGHT, MEN! SOMETHING'S HAMMERING THE ***HOLY LIVING HELL*** OUT OF OUR SKY COMMAND!

WHATEVER IT IS, THEY SAY IT ***EVACUATED*** AND ***COMMANDEERED*** ONE OF OUR ***OWN***--

--AND IT'S HEADED *THIS* WAY!

INCOMING!

FAWHOOM

WELL...

...*THAT* WAS A SHORT FLIGHT.

HOLD ON! THERE'S SOMETHIN' ***MOVIN'*** IN THE ***WRECKAGE!*** IT'S-- IT'S--

YOU. WHERE'S THE ***SULTAN?***

--IT'S A *GUY* WITH A *BAD HAIRCUT?*

FREEZE!

NO.

SEE, ***THIS*** IS WHY I NEVER STOP TO ASK FOR *DIRECTIONS.* ***WHERE*** IS

THE ***SULTAN?***

I *RESCIND* MY EARLIER *JUDGMENT*. YOU SEEM QUITE *PROFICIENT* IN YOUR *PILOTING* ABILITIES...

...FOR A *MAMMAL*.

WE'RE STILL *ALIVE*, THANKS TO *SAM*. I'LL LEAVE IT TO *YOU* TO GET PAST THE *SEVERELY* THINNED *FLEET*. YOU'RE NOT BAD AT THIS *YOURSELF*...

...FOR A *REPTAUR*.

RONOLO!

TRANSCEIVER *AMPLIFIED*...RE-ROUTING THE SIGNAL THROUGH THE NEAREST *UNION CRAFT*...

WHAT ON *GAIA*...?

...AND WE'RE *ON THE AIR!* ZANNI, SAY YOUR *PIECE!*

HURRY!

MR. PRESIDENT, YOU *ASSURED* MY *SAFETY!* WHAT'S GOING *ON* DOWN THERE?

I'M PROMISED IT WILL SOON BE UNDER CONTROL, RONOLO!

YOU HAVE *NOTHING* TO *WORRY* ABOUT!

SIR! YOU'RE RECEIVING A *PRIORITY CALL!*

GIVE IT *HERE!* IN THE *MEANTIME,* TELL SECURITY TO *BARRICADE THE--*

"--DOORS."

SKRAACHOOM

*--REPEAT! THIS IS AMBASSADOR **ZANNIATI ORIBATTA,** IDENTITY CONFIRM CODE **727-THETA GAMMA!***

*THIS **SAURIAN CRAFT** IS UNDER **MY CONTROL** AND I COME IN **PEACE!** THIS CRAFT WAS COMMANDEERED IN **DESPERATION** IN ORDER TO DELIVER THE **DELASSIAN WARPDRIVE--***

*--DESPITE SULTAN RONOLO'S **VERIFIED ATTEMPTS** TO **DESTROY** THE PROTOTYPE AND **MURDER ITS MESSENGERS** WITH HIS **OWN HANDS!***

MISTER PRESIDENT, I *IMPLORE* YOU TO CALL *OFF* YOUR ATTACK AND FOCUS ON THE *TRUE* ENEMY! GRANT ME *AUDIENCE*--

--AND I CAN DELIVER *DIRECTLY* TO YOU *INCONTROVERTIBLE EVIDENCE* THAT THE SULTAN IS *WHOLLY* AND *REPEATEDLY GUILTY*--

--OF *CONSPIRING AGAINST THE PLANETARY UNION!*

BTHAM

I HEARD *THAT*. BUT Y'KNOW *WHAT*, MR. PRESIDENT?

I AM *PERSONALLY* TAKIN' THE RESPONSIBILITY OF *PUNISHMENT* OFF YOUR *HANDS*--

--BEFORE THAT RAT COWARD GETS *AWAY* AGAIN!

STOP *RIGHT THERE!* I PROMISE YOU THIS MAN ISN'T GOING *ANYWHERE*-- NOT *NOW*.

TRUE. HOWEVER...

...YOU ARE.

NO!

C'MON, GROUND! MORPH! MORPH!

MORPH!

FURMPH

SIR! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

I'LL TAKE THAT AS A YES!

GYAAHYHHYNNG

AND AS FOR YOU, "O EXALTED ONE"...

...

...YOU SURE CAN *RUN* FAST.

DAMN.

...CLEARED OF ANY AND ALL *CHARGES,* SAM. I EXPLAINED TO THE UNION PRESIDENT THAT YOU WERE SIMPLY TRYING TO PREVENT HIS *ASSASSINATION*...

...WHICH IS NOT EVEN REMOTELY TRUE, BUT IT MAKES FOR A *MUCH* SIMPLER EXPLANATION, SO LET'S GO WITH THAT.

'KAY. I JUST WISH I'D GOTTEN A CHANCE T'INTRODUCE RONOLO TO HIS OWN *ORIFICES.*

YOU BEAT HIM ***NONETHELESS,*** SAM. YOU'RE PROBABLY THE FIRST MAN IN ***YEARS*** TO REALLY ***RATTLE*** THE SULTAN.

YOU FORCED HIM TO SHOW HIS ***TRUE COLORS,*** AND NOW THE WHOLE ***PLANET*** IS LOOKING FOR HIM.

HE'LL NEVER MAKE IT BACK TO ***TANIPAL.***

WHICH LEAVES IT WITHOUT A ***RULER...*** WHICH GIVES THE UNION ITS EXCUSE TO TAKE TANIPAL BY ***FORCE,*** GIVING US A ***NEW*** ADVANTAGE AGAINST THE ***SAURIANS.***

THANK YOU, SAM.

Aw, IT WAS ***NOTHIN'.***

OKAY, IT WAS ACTUALLY PRETTY ***IMPRESSIVE.*** YOU ***WIN.*** WHERE'S THE ***WARPDRIVE?***

ALREADY IN THE HANDS OF THE ***UNION TECHS*** -- MINUS A FEW ***KEY COMPONENTS.***

AFTER ALL, I STILL NEED IT AS A ***BARGAINING CHIP.*** DELASSIA AND MY PEOPLE STILL DON'T HAVE FULL UNION ***STATUS...***

...BUT I EXPECT THAT... AND A FEW ***OTHER*** THINGS... TO ***CHANGE*** THIS AFTERNOON.

JUST DON'T DRAW YOUR NEGOTIATIONS ***OUT*** TOO LONG.

IF -- ***IF*** -- LOSER'S TELLING THE ***TRUTH,*** WEAPONSMASTER'S STILL PLANNING AN ***ATTACK*** ON DELASSIA.

DON'T WORRY. I HAVE SOMETHING INTRIGUING TO NEGOTIATE IN REGARDS TO ***THAT,*** AS WELL.

IN THE MEANTIME, UNION SCIENTISTS ARE CHAMPING AT THE ***BIT*** TO STUDY EVERY ***NUT*** AND ***BOLT*** IN LOSER'S SHIP. I SUGGEST YOU SNEAK HIM INTO THE *BITTERLUCK* ***ASAP...***

"...WHILE I GO TAKE CARE OF ***BUSINESS***."

YOU DIDN'T TELL SAM WHAT YOU HAVE IN MIND FOR ***HIM?***

IT'S A ***SURPRISE.***

I'LL SAY...

WHAT *KIND* OF SKIN CONDITION?

YOU DON'T WANNA KNOW.

ONE SIDE! TWO NORMAL, EVERYDAY HUMAN GUYS COMIN' *THROUGH!* YEP! THAT'S *US,* JUST A COUPLA REGULAR *JOES!* STAND *ASIDE!*

HOW *BAD* A SKIN CONDITION?

UG-LEEE. IF I COULD *THROW UP,* I *WOULD.*

I *HEARD* THAT.

YOU GOT A *BETTER* STORY? GAIA'S A REALLY *SUCKY PLACE* FOR A SAURIAN TO BE *VACATIONING.*

'COURSE, IF YOU *WANT,* WE *CAN* LET THE SOLDIERS FIGHT OVER TAKIN' YOUR *SPINE* HOME AS A *SOUVE--*

--NIR--!

SAM, WHO IS THIS--

--AND WHY IS HE SITTING IN *YOUR COMMAND CHAIR?*

"HE" IS *TRENIN...*

...AND *"HE"* HAS COME TO *RECLAIM HIS SHIP.*

WHAT?

WHOA! WHOA! WHOA!

HEY, ROI, YOU REMEMBER ME TELLIN' YOU ABOUT THE SIDE OF BEEF WHO *KIDNAPPED* ME--SAID HE WANTED T'*STUDY* ME--

--AND THEN, WHEN I STARTED TO *WHIP HIS BUTT, BAILED* ON HIS *OWN SHIP*?

WHICH, I'VE NOTICED, HAS BEEN GRAFTED TO *YOUR* CRAFT.

IF YOU'D *LIKE,* I'LL SEND BACK SOME OF ITS CURIOUSLY RUSTIC *PIECES* ONCE I'M DONE REMOVING THE *CLUTTER.*

YEAH? WELL, ONE OF THOSE *"RUSTIC PIECES"* IS A *FRIEND* OF MINE, YOU ARROGANT--

HOLD. THAT'S THE SAURIAN KNOWN AS *TCHLUSARUD,* IS IT NOT?

WHY IS HE *WITH* YOU? I BELIEVED YOU TO BE *SWORN ENEMIES.*

WE ARE ALLIES BY *NECESSITY,* STRANGER.

THE *GODDESS* TCHYALHTUA HAS POSITIONED OUR RACES INTO A WAR *NO ONE* CAN WIN.

THE *GODDESS* YAL--

Hmmm.

SAMANDAHL REY, I HAVE *RECONSIDERED.* THIS SHIP REMAINS *YOURS* FOR...A BIT *LONGER.*

I SUSPECT YOU MAY HAVE *NEED* OF IT...

SAM...?

DON'T ASK ME. I JUST *WORK* HERE.

ZANNI! HOW'D IT *GO?*

ASTOUNDINGLY WELL, SAM!

THE UNION WAS SO EAGER TO EQUIP ITS FLEET WITH THE *WARPDRIVE,* THEY MET *EVERY SINGLE ONE* OF MY DEMANDS.

EFFECTIVE *IMMEDIATELY,* *DELASSIA* ENJOYS *ALL UNION PRIVILEGES* -- *INCLUDING* FULL AND TOTAL PROTECTION FROM THE COMING *SAURIAN INVASION* -- WHICH IS *GOOD* --

--BECAUSE UNION SPIES *VERIFY* TCHLUSARUD'S STORY. KHYRADON HAS BEEN GRANTED *INCREDIBLE* PARANORMAL POWERS AND PLANS TO *USE* THEM.

AT MY *URGING,* UNION OFFICIALS WERE FORCED TO ADMIT THAT OUR ONLY CHANCE OF *STOPPING* THE SAURIAN FLEET...

...IS TO GIVE COMMAND OF OUR TROOPS TO SOMEONE OF EQUAL POWER.

WHAT?

CONGRATULATIONS, SAM. EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY--

-- *YOU* ARE THE *ACTING COMMANDER* OF THE *UNION ARMY!*

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SO WHERE'S SAM?

HAVEN'T SEEN HIM TODAY.

NO, I MEAN WHERE *IS* SAM WITH ALL OF THIS? WHAT'S HE *THINKING?* WHAT'S HE PLANNING?

NOT SURE. SAID HE HAD SOME *BIG DECISION* TO MAKE.

...KNOW HOW LONG I *HAD* THIS DAMN SHIP?

KNOWWHATCHAMEAN. LEAST IT WAS *IT* AND NOT *YOU.* HELL, HE *HOSPITALIZED* TWENTY-EIGHT MEN.

I HEARD TWENTY-NINE.

"REMEMBER, *KHYRADON'S* SET HIMSELF UP AS A *SAURIAN GOD.* ACCORDING TO OUR *INFORMATION,* HE'S READYING HIS FLEET FOR A *MASSIVE STRIKE* AGAINST US...

"...IF *TCHLASARUD* WAS TELLING THE *TRUTH* WHEN HE CAME TO SAM SEEKING A *TRUCE*...AND WHILE THAT'S A *BIG "IF"*...

"...*ZANNI* NOT ONLY CONVINCED THE UNION THAT THEY COULDN'T IGNORE EVEN THE *POSSIBILITY* OF A SAURIAN OFFENSIVE...

"...BUT THAT A *COUNTERSTRIKE* REQUIRED A *FIELD COMMANDER* WITH POWER ENOUGH TO *MATCH* KHYRADON."

THAT'S QUITE A STEP *UP* FOR AN EX-SOLDIER LIKE *SAM*. CLEARLY, THE UNION LEADERS *RESPECT* HIM ON *SOME* LEVEL.

THEY DO... BUT *THEY'RE* NOT THE *PROBLEM*.

THINK BACK. IN ORDER TO GET TO *RONOLO* BEFORE HE COULD ENDANGER *EVERYBODY*, SAM HAD NO TIME TO *NEGOTIATE*. HE HAD TO CUT *THROUGH* THE UNION ARMY LIKE A *METEOR* WITH A *CREW CUT*...

...IN THE PROCESS, TAKING OUT A *LOT*... A *LOT*...OF UNION ARMAMENTS AND SHIPS...

...BREAKING A FEW BONES, BUSTING A FEW *NOSES*...

...GOTTA *ADMIT, WHOEVER* THIS GUY IS, HE MAKES A GREAT *WEAPON*.

WEAPON, *SCHMEAPON*. CAN WE HAVE AN *EXPERIENCED* LEADER, PLEASE?

LIKE IT *MATTERS*. A STRIKE ON *TCHARUN'D* BE TOUGH *ENOUGH* IF WE WERE AT *FULL STRENGTH*.

MIND TELLING ME WHY I GOTTA LISTEN *ONE SECOND* TO A LOON WHO'S STILL PICKIN' MY *RIFLE* OUTTA HIS *BOOT TREADS*?

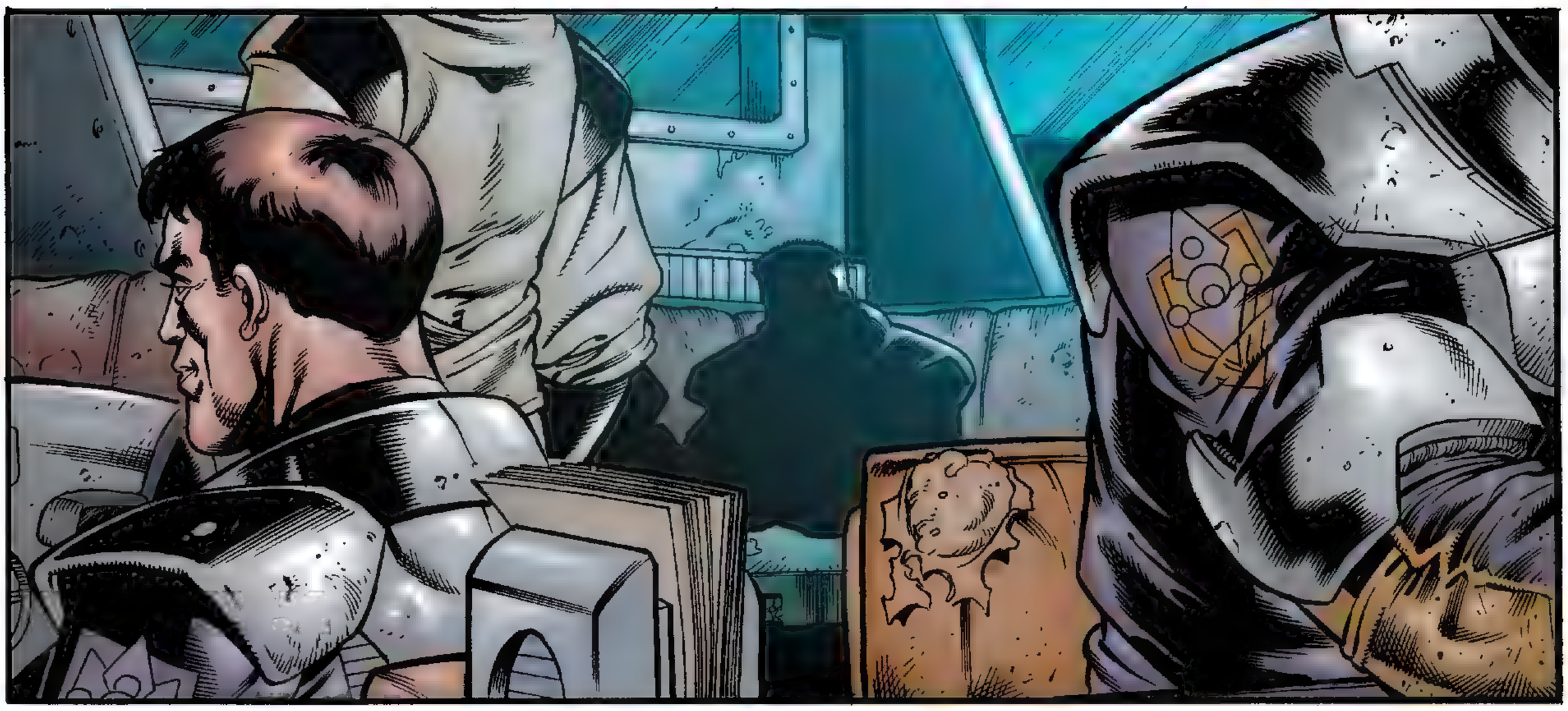
...SO LET'S JUST SAY SAM'S TROOPS AREN'T OVERLY...*DEVOTED* TO HIM RIGHT NOW.

SO WHERE IS SAM?

PROBABLY WEIGHING IT ALL IN HIS MIND.

NO, THIS TIME I MEAN, LITERALLY, "*WHERE IS SAM?*"

SAME PLACE HE *ALWAYS* GOES TO MAKE SOME *BIG DECISION*.



YOU *HEARD* ME, HONEY. ANOTHER ROUND, AND THIS TIME, *SHAKE* THAT LITTLE--

--?

COLONEL *BRODOR*, SIR...DO YOU REMEMBER *SAMANDAHL REY?*

REMEMBER HIM? I DRINK TO *FORGET* HIM.

THEN IT AIN'T *WORKIN'*, SIR, 'CAUSE I JUST SAW

WELL, WELL. IT'S BEEN A *LONG TIME.*

SO *THIS* IS THE MYSTERY *FIELD COMMANDER* WHOSE JOB IT IS TO *LEAD* US.

YOU TRULY EXPECT *ME* TO FOLLOW *YOU* INTO HELL?

NO. *YOU...*

...YOU, I'M GIVIN' A **HEAD START!**

THAT'S IT. *HIT* ME...

...THAT A *VERBAL* BRIEFING WAS *UNNECESSARY*...

...GIVEN THAT WE NOW HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY TO TAKE THE COPIOUS DATA PERTAINING TO REY'S *UPCOMING MISSION*...

...AND PLANT IT *DIRECTLY INTO HIS BRAIN.*

UNNNNNN...

SHAKE IT *OFF,* SOLDIER. WHAT'S YOUR TARGET'S *LATITUDE?*

TWO... TWO-SEVENTY *WEST*...

AND... LET'S SEE... *ALTITUDE?*

SIX-POINT-NINE METERS...OVER *SEA LEVEL,* SIR.

EXCELLENT. WE'LL CHECK TO MAKE CERTAIN YOU REMEMBER THE *REST,* BUT THIS AUGURS *WELL.*

THIS IS A *ONE-MAN COVERT OP,* SOLDIER. WE CAN'T AFFORD TO COMMIT *ANY* DETAILS TO *PAPER.*

THE *SAURIANS* SHOT ONE OF OUR MEN DOWN OVER WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE A *NEUTRAL PLANET*...

...BUT WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW IS THAT HE WENT DOWN NOT FAR FROM A *HIDDEN UNION BASE.*

HE'S TOO INJURED TO MAKE IT THERE ON HIS OWN... AND WE CAN'T RISK MAKING RADIO *CONTACT* WITH THE BASE AND HAVING THAT TRANSMISSION *TRACED.*

YOU'RE TO *CARRY* HIM THERE. THE *CHALLENGE* IS *ROUTINE.* THERE'S NO SIGNIFICANT SAURIAN *ACTIVITY* IN THE AREA.

GOOD *THING.* IF THOSE FILTHY *REPTAURS* HAD A HOSTAGE, THEY'D HAVE EATEN HIM BY *NOW.*

DON'T WORRY, SIR. I HAVE *CLEARANCE* FOR THIS INFORMATION. I KNOW THE SAURIANS GATHER OUR TRAITS AND OUR KNOWLEDGE BY... WELL, BY *DEVOURING* US.

I WON'T LET THAT HAPPEN *TODAY.*

SEE THAT YOU *DON'T.* GOOD *LUCK,* SOLDIER...

"...AND KEEP YOUR EYES *OPEN.*"

OKAY...

...*NOW* WHAT?

ENGAGE *WRIST RECORDER.*

MEEP Engaged.

RECORDING. ESTIMATING TIME AT *ARRIVAL PLUS 94 HOURS.* THE GAP IN MY DOCUMENTATION'S EASY TO *ACCOUNT* FOR:

NOT *ONLY* DID I FAIL TO FIND THE *DOWNED FLYER...*

...BUT A SMALL, ENTRENCHED *ENCAMPMENT* OF SIX OR SEVEN SAURIANS--PRESENCE *UNFORSEEN*--HELD ME *CAPTIVE* FOR APPROXIMATELY *THREE NIGHT-CYCLES.*

I *ESCAPED*--*BARELY*--AND HAVE FOUND MYSELF WITHIN *METERS* OF *SAFETY.*

HAVING ELUDED MY *PURSUERS,* I'VE *ZEROED* MY CHANCE OF *LEADING* THEM TO OUR *HIDDEN BASE*--WHICH SHOULD BE *JUST AHEAD* AND TO THE--

FWAAASH

DAMN IT! THEY *TRAILED* ME!

NO! *SCRATCH* THAT! THIS IS AN EVEN *BIGGER* BAND!

GRIFE, FOR A *NEUTRAL WORLD,* THIS CLAYBALL IS *SWARMIN'* WITH ENEMY FORCES!

SO MUCH FOR *SECRETS!* IF I STAY HERE TO *DIE,* THEY'LL DINE THE BASE COORDINATES OUTTA ME *ANYWAY*--

--SO I MAY AS WELL *RACE* 'EM THERE AND HOPE SOMEBODY HEARS ME *KNOCKIN'!*

IN MY *MIND,* I CAN SEE IT PLAIN AS *DAY!* BIG WHITE *DOME* ABOUT 400 METERS *ACROSS*--IT CAN HOLD THESE RAGTAGS OFF, NO *SWEAT!*

JUST A FEW MORE *STEPS*... RIGHT OVER THIS *RIDGE* AND...

...AND...
...NOTHING...?
BUT... BUT...
CHKK
KCHAK KCHAK KCHAK KCHAK KCHAK KCHAK
SPUOW SPUOW SPUOW SPUOW SPUOW SPUOW SPUOW SPUOW SPUOW

AIEEE-

JK-90S AND LANDMINES? WHAT THE HELL IS GOIN' ON HERE?!

FWOOM

BUDDABOW BUDDABOW

spyOWspyOWspyOWspyOWspyOWspyO

FACK

MEEP
Wrist recorder awaiting FURTHER INPUT

I'M A LITTLE BUSY RIGHT NOW!

ZEEEEEEE

BUDDABOW BUDDABOW BUDDABOW BUDDABOW BUDDABOW BUDDABOW

FWOOM

SPING

FWOOM

LUCKY TO BE *ALIVE*. THE *GOOD* NEWS IS, WHATEVER *THAT* WAS ABOUT, IT LEFT ONLY *TWO SAURIANS STANDING*.

THE *BAD* NEWS IS, THEY'RE COMIN' *THIS WAY*.

NEED A *WEAPON*. THINK. *THINK*.

THI--

'KAY. SOIL'S A DIFFERENT SHADE WHERE THE *BOOBY-TRAPS* ARE HIDDEN.

SAURIAN EYES HAVE A HARD TIME WITH *COLORS.* IF I HAFTA *STRAIN* T'SEE WHERE THE *MINES* ARE BURIED--

--I'LL BET *THEY* HAVEN'T GOT A *CLUE.* IN *FACT*--

--I'M GAMBLIN' MY *LIFE* ON IT!

CHKK

CHOOM

ZZWEEEEEEE

INSTRUMENTS REGISTER *TEN CORPSES* AND *NO SIGN* OF SAURIAN LIFE.

WHAT DO YOU *EXPECT?* PLACE LOOKS LIKE A *WARZONE*. MAKE A *LOG ENTRY* THAT *OPERATION BLINDSIDE* WAS SUCCESSFUL TO A *FAULT*.

SHAME ABOUT *REY*, THOUGH. HE REALLY HAD *NO INKLING...?*

NAH. THAT'S *COMBAT* FOR YOU, THOUGH.

YOU GOTTA BREAK A FEW *EGGS*...

BRODOR.

NOW.

"...REGARDS, COL. S. BRODOR." READ THAT BACK TO ME...?

GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME BEFORE I BREAK YOUR FACE!

NO, THAT'S NOT IT...

REY? I'M SURPRISED TO SEE YOU BACK SO--

SO WHAT? SO MEAT-ON-THE-BONE?

SIR, WE TRIED TO STOP HIM! PRIVATE, CALL THE PSYCH SQUAD!

=SIGH=

NO NEED, SOLDIER. EVERYONE BUT REY... DISMISSED.

BUT, SIR! HE'S--

--RUNNING THE RISK OF COMMITTING TREASON IF YOU STAY. GO.

YOU BASTARD! I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO COME BACK, WAS I?

THERE NEVER WAS A HOSTAGE! THERE NEVER WAS A "SECRET UNION BASE"!

WHEN YOU CRAMMED DATA INTO MY SKULL, I WAS FED MISINFORMATION ON PURPOSE--

--SO *I* COULD BE FED TO THE ***SAURIANS!***

YOU COULD SET ME UP AS ***BAIT***--LITERALLY, ***BAIT!***--T'SEE IF WE COULD ***MANIPULATE*** WHAT THEY ***LEARNED! ADMIT*** IT!

I ***DO.***

FRANKLY, IT'S EXCEEDINGLY UNLIKELY THAT ANY ONE HUMAN MIND COULD HAVE ***ANY*** MEASURABLE IMPACT--

--BUT IT'S SOMETHING WE NEED TO KNOW ***NONETHELESS.*** IF WE COULD ***CONTROL*** THE FLOW OF ***INFORMATION*** THAT WAY, WE COULD END THIS WAR IN A ***MONTH.***

WHEN WE HEARD THE SAURIANS HAD ***INDEED*** FALLEN INTO OUR PRE-PLANTED ***TRAP,*** WE ASSUMED YOU'D BEEN... ***CONSUMED*** AND THAT OUR EXPERIMENT HAD BORNE ***FRUIT.***

SADLY, THOSE RESULTS ARE NOW CLEARLY ***INVALID*** SINCE YOU LED SAURIANS ***DIRECTLY*** INSTEAD OF ***INDIRECTLY.***

WHICH MEANS ***WHAT?*** YOU'LL TRY ***AGAIN?*** NOT IF I ***SQUAWK*** LOUD ENOUGH, YOU SANCTIMONIOUS--

AND I'LL SEE YOU EXECUTED FOR ***TREASON.***

ONLY A ***SELECT FEW*** WILL EVER ***KNOW*** WHAT SAURIANS DO TO HUMANS-- UNLESS ***YOU*** GO ***PUBLIC.***

ARE YOU READY TO PULL THE PIN ON THAT GRENADE? DO YOU REMEMBER HOW ***ENRAGED*** YOU WERE WHEN ***YOU*** FOUND OUT?

THE UNION'S ***FUTURE*** DEPENDS ON MAINTAINING A ***DISCIPLINED ARMY.***

CAN YOU ***IMAGINE*** THE REPERCUSSIONS OF DECLASSIFYING THIS INFORMATION?

FORGET THE HORRIFIED ***CIVILIANS***--CAN YOU SUGGEST ***ANY*** WAY OF KEEPING OUR SOLDIERS FROM GOING ***BERSERK*** ONCE THEY ***KNOW?***

THAT'S WHAT I ***THOUGHT.***

DESPITE YOUR ***REPUTATION,*** REY, YOU'RE A ***SMART MAN.***

YOU'LL KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT. YOU DON'T THREATEN ***ME.***

...DON'T THREATEN *ME.*

WHAT--?

WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE *GOING,* SOLDIER?

I HAVE SOME THINGS I WANT TO *SAY* TO YOU!

YOU'VE SAID *ENOUGH,* BRODOR.

MATTER OF FACT...YOU SAID *JUST THE RIGHT THING.*

Nuh-uh. "*FIELD COMMANDER*," MY ***ASS***. YOU WANNA ***LEAVE***... COM***MAN***DER...

...YOU LEAVE ***THROUGH ME***.

THANKS. I NEEDED THAT.

REALLY.

"THE UNION ARMY.

"LOOK AT 'EM."

I'VE SEEN BETTER MORALE ON *DEATH ROW.*

SAM, ARE YOU ***SURE*** ABOUT THIS?

NO. BUT THE FLEET'S GOTTA HIT ***KHYRADON*** BEFORE ***KHYRADON*** HITS ***US***...AND THAT ***ALONE*** DOESN'T SEEM T'BE ENOUGH TO RALLY THE ***TROOPS.***

THEY'RE JUST NOT READY TO ***FIGHT.*** NOT UNLESS I...

YOU'RE ***WITH*** ME ON THIS, LOSER? YOU'RE ***SURE?*** IT'S ONLY GONNA MAKE ***YOUR*** LIFE ***WORSE.***

WHICH TO ***ME*** IS A ***PLUS,*** BUT I'M TRYIN' NOT TO ***THINK*** OF IT THAT WAY. WELL?

*"**WORSE**" IS THE VERY **DEFINITION** OF **UNDERSTATEMENT,** SAMANDAHL REY.*

*EVEN **NOW,** IF YOUR SOLDIERS KNEW THAT I WAS HIDDEN ABOARD YOUR **SHIP,** THEY WOULD NO DOUBT HAVE MY **CARCASS** ON A **SPIT.***

*STILL, THESE ARE **DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES.** FOR WHATEVER IT MAY BE **WORTH,** YOUR **PLAN OF GAMING--***

"GAME PLAN."

*--"GAME PLAN," THOUGH DANGEROUS TO **BOTH** OUR RACES... SEEMS **SOUND.***

AND *YOU*, ZAN?

IN THE HANDS OF A LESSER MAN, IT COULD *BACKFIRE*. I DON'T TRUST OTHERS VERY *EASILY*, SAM... BUT AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH TOGETHER...

...I'D BE A *FOOL* NOT TO TRUST *YOU*.

JUST DON'T BLOW IT.

PARDON?

NOTHING. GOOD *LUCK*, SAM, AND...

...AND COME *BACK* TO ME.

ALL RIGHT, MEN...

...LISTEN *UP.*

OR WHAT? YOU LL TOTAL A FEW *STARCRAFT?*

I *HEARD* THAT.

GOT EVERYONE'S *ATTENTION? GOOD.*

I'VE BEEN HEMMIN' AND HAWIN' ALL NIGHT OVER WHAT I'M ABOUT TO LAY *DOWN*...BUT I'M JUST GONNA *SAY* IT.

THIS IS HOW IT *IS.* WE'VE BEEN AT *WAR* WITH THE SAURIANS SINCE BEFORE YOUR *GRANDFATHERS* WERE BORN. BY NOW, WE'RE SO FAMILIAR WITH THE *ENEMY,* NOT ONLY HAVE THEY LOST SOME OF THEIR *THREAT...*

...WE'VE LOST SOME OF OUR *FIRE.*

FIRE WE *CANNOT WIN WITHOUT.*

WELL...LET *THIS* LIGHT YOUR TORCH. PICTURE EVERY FRIEND YOU EVER *HAD* WHO BECAME A *P.O.W....* AND KNOW THE *TRUTH* WE'VE KEPT FROM YOU *ALL THIS TIME.*

THE SAURIANS DON'T JUST *TAKE* PRISONERS...

...THEY *BAKE* THEM.

THAT'S RIGHT. THEY'VE BEEN GROWING... *LEARNING... MUTATING FOR DECADES...* BY *EATING*

HUMAN

FLESH.

I SEE *THAT* GOT YOUR ATTENTION.

IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, ASK *BRODOR*. ISN'T THAT RIGHT... *SIR?*

REY, YOU *LUNATIC!* WHAT ARE YOU--?

PULLING A *GRENADE PIN.*

COLONEL, IS IT...IS IT *TRUE?*

...

YES.

WE'VE KNOWN THIS FOR *SOME YEARS* NOW...

...BUT IT *STOPS TODAY.*

BE ANGRY. BE *FURIOUS.* BE *READY TO FIGHT...*

...AND BE *DETERMINED TO WIN!*

LONG LIVE THE UNION!

LONG LIVE HUMANITY!

LONG LIVE THE UNION!

LONG LIVE HUMANITY!

THIS...

...THIS IS NOT *GOOD*, LITTLE SIGIL-BEARER.

I HAVE VERY DEFINITE *BOUNDARIES* IN MIND FOR YOU...

...AND YOU ARE PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO *BREACHING* THEM.

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...UNDERSTAND, KHYRADON, THAT OPPOSITION IS *FIERCE?*

THAT, IN *ADDITION,* YOUR OWN *STUDENT* HAS TURNED *AGAINST* YOU?

I WILL... *DEAL* WITH *TCHLUSARUD*, GODDESS KHYALHTUA. THEN, IN YOUR HONOR, I WILL DIP HIS *SKULL* INTO THE BLOOD OF THE *HUMAN RACE* AND DRINK *HEARTILY*.

BLESSED ARE THE SAURIANS THAT YOU HAVE BESTOWED UPON ME *POWER*... GIVEN ME *RAIMENT*... SO THAT I MIGHT LEAD THEM TO THEIR *DESTINY*...

...AND ALLOW THEM THE *VENGEANCE* THEY *CRAVE*...

...NOW THAT I HAVE SHOWN THEM THE *FACE* OF THEIR *TRUE ENEMY*.

VERY WELL. THOUGH I *DEPART*, I WILL *LISTEN* FOR YOUR *PRAYERS*...

...BEGINNING WITH *THIS*... THE MOST *SACRED* OF WARRIOR *CEREMONIES*.

FAREWELL, KHYRADON.

DO ME *PROUD*.

IT IS MY *ONLY DESIRE*, MY GODDESS.

JOIN ME!

BY THE BLACK WATERS OF *KHA'XXON*...

BY THE BLACK WATERS OF *KHA'XXON*...

...BY THE TEARS OF *TCHRUKAR*...

...BY THE TEARS OF *TCHRUKAR*...

...MAY THE BLEEDING AND PAIN WE ENDURE THIS DAY BE AS *NOTHING* TO THE *ETERNAL AGONIES* WE SHALL EXACT...

...UPON OUR *GREATEST* FOE.

THERE YOU *GO*, LITTLE SIGIL-BEARER. MY WORK HERE IS *DONE*. AT LAST, THE SCALES OF POWER HAVE BEEN PROPERLY *BALANCED*.

NOW... LET'S SEE JUST HOW FORMIDABLE A WARRIOR YOU *ARE*...

"...SAMANDAHL REY."

JeMERIK'S HOLDIN' DOWN THE ***REAR DECK.*** ALL SHIPS IN ***POSITION,*** ROIYA?

CHECK.

GOOD. ***TCHLUSARUD*** HERE SAYS THE SAURIANS ARE PREPPIN' THEIR ***FLEET*** EVEN ***NOW.*** THE ONLY WAY ***WE*** STAND A CHANCE IS TO GET THE ***JUMP*** ON 'EM --

-- KNOCK THE ***SNOT*** OUT OF 'EM BEFORE THEY CAN GET ***OFF-WORLD*** AND HIT ***US.***

'SARUD, WHY DON'T YOU 'N' I SWAP ***PLACES?***

YOU'RE TRYING TO KEEP ME AWAY FROM THE ***COMM UNIT.***

...

MAYBE.

I HAVE ***NO ONE*** TO ***WARN.*** HAVE I NOT YET ***CONVINCED*** YOU THAT, HOWEVER ***UNCOMFORTABLY,*** WE ARE ***ALLIES,*** YOU AND I?

KHYRADON IS A ***MADMAN*** TOO ***QUICK*** TO ***BATTLE.*** IF WE DO NOT ***STOP*** HIM FROM LEADING MY PEOPLE DOWN THIS ROAD OF ***INSANITY,*** I FEAR FOR MY RACE AND MY ***HOMEWORLD.***

SO YOU ***SAY.*** THEN ***AGAIN,*** THIS ***COULD*** ALL BE A ***TRICK*** TO GET YOUR HANDS ON OUR NEW ***WARPDRIVE.***

QUESTION ***IS,*** AM I WILLIN' TO GAMBLE THAT YOU'RE NOT THAT ***SMART?***

ANSWER: ***YES.***

HOW ***COMFORTING.***

OKAY. SHOWTIME.

ATTENTION, POINT PILOTS! SOUND OFF!

READY!

READY!

READY!

BRO!

YOU ***KIDDIN'*** ME? SAMMY, I WAS ***BORN*** READY! HELL, MY ***MAMA*** WAS BORN READY AND SHE ***DIDN'T*** LIE! I AM ***PUMPED,*** DUDE! I SAY WE KICK 'EM IN THE ASS TILL THEIR ***GRANDPAPAS*** SCREAM! 'MEMBER THAT TIME IT WAS JUST YOU 'N' ME THAT TIME 'GAINST THEM ***RODEO CLOWNS?***

POW!

"WHO'S LAUGHIN' ***NOW,*** YOU PAINTED M S?!

*HE'S **READY,** COMMANDER.*

IT SAYS ***YOU*** CO

OES IT SAY ON THIS CARD?

WING LOO-TENANT!!

R, SAMMY! I WANT YOU TO

IN' ***REPTAURS*** TO KIS

FRIEND OF YOURS?

WE... GO BACK.

PILOTS, ON MY ***MARK*** --

--WARP!

ROI, HOW LONG SHOULD THIS *TAKE?*

ALMOST NO TIME AT *ALL!*

RE-ENTERING STANDARD SPACE RIGHT ABOUT...

...NOW!

HOLY-!

COMMANDER, WHAT THE HELL

COMMANDER IT'S

RED ALERT! RED ALERT!

DON'T BELIEVE THIS

FULL REVERSE! FULL REVERSE!

NO. NO. NO. NO.

Oh, GOD. SAM--

--THEY WERE WAITING FOR US!

I KNEW IT!

YOU SCREWED US, LOSER! YOU SET US UP!

REY, I HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF --

FWAM!

=HRRGGHH!=

LIAR!

WE'RE OUTNUMBERED THREE TO ONE -- AND THERE'S YOUR BOSS STANDIN' RIGHT THERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SLAUGHTER!

ROIYA, RAM HIM!

I WOULD NOT--

SHUT UP!

RAM HIM!

SAM, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT--

WHAT'S TO KNOW? WE'RE GONNA KNOCK HIS ASS CLEAR ACROSS THE--

HOLY $#@&%!

I WARNED

DO YOU MIND? SOME OF US ARE BUSY PULLIN' THE HULL BACK TOGETHER!

WHAT WAS THAT?

THE SHARPEST DAMN AXE I'VE EVER SEEN! DO SOMETHIN'!

WHAT CAN I DO?

I BET WE'D BE SURPRISED.

I'M SURE I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU MEAN BY THAT.

HEY, YOU TWO! LESS CHATTERIN', MORE BATTERIN', OKAY?

"MY MEN ARE GETTIN' SLAUGHTERED OUT THERE, AND KHYRADON'S DROPPED OFF THE RADAR!

"WHERE THE HELL DID HE..."

...GO...

HEY, *KHYRADON...?*

GET OFF MY *SHIP.*

APE.

UNNNNNNNHH...

GO AHEAD. DISPENSE ANOTHER *ORDER.*

THEY *AMUSE* ME.

YOU TRANSMUTE *MATTER*...

...BUT I WIELD WEAPONS OF *PURE ENERGY.*

I AM *UNDEFEATABLE.*

NO.

"HMMM.

ROCK BEATS *SCISSORS.*

"*THIS* ISN'T RIGHT."

THE *SIGIL-BEARER* IS MIGHTIER THAN I'D *IMAGINED*. THE *LIZARD* IS *OUTCLASSED*. CLEARLY, THE GAME IS *UNBALANCED*...

...AND THE *PAWN* REQUIRES *FURTHER STUDY*.

UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THAT CAN *HAPPEN*...

...LET HIM BE *REMOVED* FROM THE *BOARD*.

FOOLISH *MONKEY*. I BELIEVE YOUR KIND HAS A *SAYING*:

"HE WHO HESITATES... IS *LOST*."

?

THIS ISN'T --

--IT'S NOT--

HIS *SIGIL ENERGY*--FIGHTING WITH *MINE!* BUT IF--I'M NOT *TELEPORTING* HIM--

-- WHAT *IS* HAPPENINGGGGGGAAAAHH!

SSSKOW

SAM! WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO *SAM*?

SAM!

SAM!

DEAD.

OUR ONLY *HOPE*...

...DEAD!

DRRR-KNK!

AH. THE *STUDENT.* FOR *YEARS* I *TAUGHT* YOU IN THE WAYS OF *COMBAT.*

MY *APOLOGIES* FOR NOT DOING A BETTER *JOB.*

THUNK

HE'S *NOT DEAD.*

BUT --

TRUST ME. WHERE *IS* HE, KHYRADON?

"WHERE IS SAMANDAHL REY?"

nNnnnnHh...

...

GRASS?

WHY AM I LOOKING AT--?

Oh, ***BOY***...

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SEPTEMBER 11th, 2001

Mark Waid Scot Eaton Andrew Hennessy Wil Quintana

BY THE EYES OF *ALTWAAL*, YALA --

-- WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE?* DID YOU NOT *REALIZE*--

TRENIN, STOP MAKING THIS OUT TO BE A *NEFARIOUS DEED.*

I AM A *GODDESS* OF *WAR.* IT IS MY...

CONCUPISCENT *PLEASURE.*

...*DUTY* TO STOKE THE FIRES OF *COMBAT* WHEREVER THEY MAY *BURN*...AND *KEEP* THEM AFLAME.

I THOUGHT BY GRANTING *POWER* TO *KHYRADON,* I COULD... *PROLONG* THEIR *CONJUNCTION.* GIVE IT A... *RHYTHM.*

THEN. WHAT. *HAPPENED?*

SAMANDAHL REY GOT THE *UPPER HAND.* HOW *ANTICLIMACTIC.* I WISHED HIM *AWAY...*

...AND HIS *SIGIL*... AS I *WARNED YOU IT MIGHT... INTERFERED* WITH YOUR POWER...

...THEIR *COMBINED* YET *CONFLICTING* ENERGIES SENDING REY *WHO KNOWS WHERE.*

AT A TIME THE *FIRST* HAVE *PRIORITIZED* LEARNING ABOUT THESE SIGIL-BEARERS AND WHAT THEY CAN *DO*-- TO *US*--

-- YOU'VE *LOST* ONE. WORSE *YET,* THE ONE INVISIBLE TO OUR *SENSES,* MAKING THE *HUNT* ALL BUT *IMPOSSIBLE.*

BEST TO PICK UP HIS *TRACKS*--

"--FROM WHERE WE SAW HIM *LAST*."

YOU *HEARD* ME, KHYRADON. *WHERE IS SAMANDAHL REY?*

WHEREVER *COWARDS* GO WHEN FACED WITH *EXTINCTION*, I SUPPOSE.

AREN'T YOU *SORRY* YOU DIDN'T *ACCOMPANY* HIM.

JeMERIK, IF HE TAKES *THIS* SHIP OUT, HIS FLEET'S *UNSTOPPABLE*. DO SOMETHING!

I CAN'T JUST--

THEN *WHO?* YOU *HAVE* POWER--*USE* IT!

IT'S NOT THAT *SIMPLE*--

HERE'S WHAT'S *SIMPLE!* HE'S *SIMPLY* GOING TO *KILL* US--

--BECAUSE WE'RE *SIMPLY* NO *MATCH* FOR HIM! WHAT CHOICE DO YOU *HAVE?*

IF YOU ONLY *KNEW*, ROIYA.

IF YOU ONLY KNEW.

KHYRADON--

WAIT.

ROIYA... YOU WANTED A *CHAMPION?*

I THINK YOU'RE IN *LUCK.*

HMM. FRESH *MEAT.*

PUN *INTENDED.* WHO--?

IT HARDLY *MATTERS.*

HE'S NO CHALLENGE FOR *MKKKKK*

YOU HAVE MORE PISS AND VINEGAR IN YOU THAN I'D *COUNTED* ON, LITTLE FLEA. DON'T *BOTHER* ME WHILE I'M *TRACKING.*

HOLD STILL.

HOW...*DARE* YOU! YOU SPEAK TO...THE RIGHTFUL *RULER*... OF AN ENTIRE *RACE!*

REALLY, FLEA. A CURIOUS *STATEMENT* GIVEN THAT THE *PREVIOUS* RULER STILL *LIVES.*

WHAT?

MY MOTHER...IS *ALIVE?*

YES.

FOOL! YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE *TOLD* ME! WHILE MY *FLEET* KEEPS YOU *OCCUPIED--*

--I WILL SCOUR THE *PLANET* FOR HER FUTURE *CORPSE!*

Ah. HE FLIES *AWAY.*

PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE SAID *"GNAT."*

AND *YOU?* CAN YOU ACTUALLY *TRACK* SAM?

ANSWER ME!

JeMERIK, HE'S *VANISHING! STOP HIM!*

HE'LL BE OKAY, ROIYA.

AND *US?* OUTNUMBERED *TEN* TO *ONE* AND LED BY A *COMMANDER* WHO JUST *VANISHED?*

SAM... *GOD*, SAM, WE *NEED* YOU.

I *CAN'T.* BUT I'LL DO WHAT I *CAN* TO GUARANTEE SAM'S *SAFETY* SHOULD HE...

...SHOULD HE *FIND* SAM.

WELL, *SOMEBODY* HAD BETTER! WHAT IF HE'S --

⇒WHEW⇐

TCHLUSARUD? WHERE DO YOU THINK *YOU'RE* GOING?

TO LAUNCH A *POD* OF *ESCAPING!*

IF WHAT THE STRANGER SAID IS *TRUE,* I MUST FIND THE *MATRIARCH* BEFORE *KHYRADON* DOES!

"WHERE *ARE YOU?*"

WHERE AM I?

ALL RIGHT. STAY CALM...

*...AND DON'T TRY TO FIGURE **THAT** OUT JUST YET. **THAT'S** NOT THE BIGGEST **PROBLEM** AT HAND.*

ϥⲟⲣ ⲑⲗⲁⲛ ⲟϥ ⲙⲭ ⲃⲓⲣⲧⲏ+
THIS IS.
ⲗⲉⲁⲫⲉ ⲟⲩⲣ ⲗⲁⲛⲇ+
ϥⲟⲣ ⲅⲁⲗⲗⲓⲁ+
ⲥⲧⲓⲛⲅ ⲇⲉⲉⲡ, ⲙⲭ ⲥⲱⲟⲣⲇ+

HE LOOKS AS CONFUSED AS I AM... AND BEIN' SMACK IN THE MIDDLE OF BATTLE ISN'T CLEARIN' **ANYONE'S** HEAD.

SO **THAT'S** GOTTA STOP.

AND SINCE I DON'T SPEAK THE LANGUAGE, THE ONLY WAY I KNOW OF TO BREAK UP SOMETHIN' LIKE **THIS**--

WHAT'S HE DOING?

LOOK THERE...

--IS TGIVE **BOTH** SIDES SOMETHIN' TO BE AFRAID OF!

THE ONES WHO RUN ARE OBVIOUSLY THE VISITING TEAM. THE **LOCALS** ARE THE ONES ACTIN' LIKE I'M A **GOD**-- I GUESS--I CAN'T UNDERSTAND A WORD THEY'RE **SAYIN'**--WHICH IS FLATTERIN', BUT I DON'T **CARE**--

--BECAUSE IT AIN'T GETTIN' ME **HOME!** WHAT **HAPPENED?** HOW DID KHYRADON 'PORT ME **AWAY?**

WHAT'S GOING **ON** HERE?

WE SPENT TOO MUCH TIME DEALING WITH *KHYRADON* AND THE *TRACKER!* OUR MEN NEED *SUPPORT!* THEY NEED TO BELIEVE *SAM* IS *IN CONTROL!*

DO YOU *GET* THAT?

-- LOVE OF GOD!

WING IS OUT!

COMMANDER REY, ARE YOU THERE? ARE YOU THERE?

AAAAAAA

LOSING POWER

MAYDAY! MAYDAY!

THEY'RE *DYING.*

SAM...

I CAN'T--

THEN WHAT CAN YOU DO?

ONE: I CAN REMIND YOU THAT YOU'RE *PERFECTLY QUALIFIED* TO STRATEGIZE THIS MISSION IN SAM'S ABSENCE.

TWO: I CAN MAKE YOU *SOLID* ENOUGH TO REWIRE THE *COMM CONSOLE--*

--TO *CHANGE* YOUR *VOICE.*

ATTENTION, ALL FLIERS! THIS IS *FIELD COMMANDER REY--*

--ISSUING A *CODE BLACK!*

POINT PILOT MITH, WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU TO COVER US!

YOU GOT IT, MY MAN!

THEN FORM RETREAT FORMATION --

THE EDGE

-- AND ON MY MARK --

-- WARP!

ALL IN. WE'LL BE BACK TO GAIA IN NO TIME.

YOU WERE GREAT.

THEN REWARD ME. MAKE ME SOLID AGAIN FOR A MOMENT?

THANKS.

WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU? HOW DARE YOU NOT HELP IF YOU CAN?

SOME OF THOSE MEN WERE FRIENDS OF MINE! DO YOU WANT TO TELL THEIR KIDS?

ROIYA, I'VE SAID THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT! I HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY I...CAN'T EXPLAIN...

AND I'VE GOT A HUMAN HEART I EVIDENTLY CAN'T EXPLAIN, EITHER!

DAMN IT.

I...I KNOW WHAT WE MEAN TO EACH OTHER, JeMERIK...BUT I ALSO KNOW WE CAN'T GO ANYWHERE WITH THAT UNTIL WE LEARN TO UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER...

...AND NOW ISN'T THE TIME...

NOT HERE, NO. BUT LET'S JUST SAY I HAVE A WAY OF... MAKING TIME.

LET ME SHOW YOU.

A CELEBRATION OF BATTLE... APPARENTLY TO HONOR ME, AT LEAST A LITTLE. THEY THINK I'M A GOD.

I DON'T WANT TO BE HONORED.

I WANT TO BE HOME.

I WISH AN AUDIENCE, HOLY ONE.

WILL YOU KNOCK IT OFF? I'M JUST A GUY! ONE WHO'S WONDERIN' WHY YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE SPEAKIN' MY LANGUAGE. WHO ARE YOU?

I AM BRATH, LEADER OF THE CLAN MAC GAREN -- AND SINCE I'VE BEEN TAUGHT NO LANGUAGE OTHER THAN MY OWN, I SUSPECT OUR BOND LIES NOT IN WORDS BUT IN OUR COMMON BRAND.

THE MAGIC IT CONJURES, STRANGER--

SAM.

--SAM--
I SENSE YOU WILL NOT TURN IT AGAINST US. THAT PERHAPS YOU MAY EVEN HELP US.

WHOA. WHOA. I'VE GOT PROBLEMS OF MY OWN. LET'S TAKE THIS FROM THE TOP...

SO WE COMPARE NOTES. I TELL BRATH ABOUT MY SIGIL... THEN HE GOES.

SEASONS GONE, I WAS BUT A SIMPLE HUNTSMAN, UNTIL ONE NIGHT...

"...ONE NIGHT, I CHANCED UPON A STAG MIGHTIER THAN ANY I HAD EVER ENCOUNTERED. WITH LESS THAN A WHISPER OF SOUND, I SET MY SIGHTS..."

"...ONLY TO HAVE HIM *BOLT* WITH A SPEED FAR BELYING HIS *SIZE*."

"HE LED ME ON A CHASE *LONG* AND *VAST*... NEVER LOSING ENOUGH DISTANCE TO BE *CAUGHT*, NEVER GAINING ENOUGH TO *DISCOURAGE*."

"'ERE LONG, TO A *CLEARING* HE LED ME -- AND TO A MYSTERIOUS *ALTAR*, PAEAN TO OUR *GOD* -- ONE DOUBTLESS AS UNFAMILIAR TO YOU AS ARE THE STARS TO THE DWELLERS OF THE *SEA*."

"FOR HOURS, *FILLED* WITH *WONDER*, I CONTEMPLATED THIS MAGNIFICENT STONE STATUE."

"AND THEN IT *MOVED*."

"SO HARD DID IT *SEIZE* ME, IT CRUSHED THE *AIR* FROM MY *LUNGS*... AND YET, I HEARD *SCREAMING*..."

"...IN A VOICE NOT MY *OWN*."

"THE IDOL'S GRIP FILLED MY EARS WITH THE CRY OF A *MILLION VOICES*... SEARED MY *HEART* WITH THE FIRE OF A BILLION *EMOTIONS*.

"THE HUNGER OF AN *INFANT*. THE *LONELINESS* OF A *DYING MAN*.

"THE MEANING OF THE BULL'S RASP AND THE BLACKSMITH'S *SCOWL*. IN THAT INSTANT, I UNDERSTOOD IT *ALL*...

"...ONLY TO *AWAKE*... THOSE SENSATIONS FADING LIKE THE MEMORIES OF A *DREAM*.

"FADING...BUT NOT *EVAPORATING*.

"FROM THAT NIGHT *ON*, THE *BRAND* LEFT UPON MY CHEST RENDERED UNTO ME A CERTAIN... *EMPATHY*.

"A UNIQUE GIFT FOR *COMMUNICATION*, BE IT AN ABILITY TO READ *DESIRES* AND MEDIATE *PEACE*...

"...OR ANTICIPATE THE STRATEGY OF THE *ENEMY*... THE MOVES OF ANY COMBATANT WHO DARED *FACE* ME IN *COMBAT*."

I HAVE *USED* THESE ABILITIES TO UNITE THE DISPARATE CLANS OF MY *HOMELAND* AGAINST THE INCURSIONS OF THE *GALLIANS*... BUT...

...BUT YOU'RE *LOSIN' GROUND.*

...

YES. MORE *EVERY DAY.*

RESOURCES?

FEW. WE HOLD *DESPERATELY* TO A LAND INCREASINGLY *BARREN* OF CROPS AS FARMERS ARE FORCED TO ABANDON *PLOWS* FOR *SWORDS.* BUT IT IS STILL *OUR LAND.* OUR *HOME.*

ALLIES?

CHIEFLY *TWO.*

MY COMPANION, *TANIELLA*...

...AND THE PHILOSOPHER *SAVAL.*

WITH BRATH'S HAND ON TANIELLA'S **SHOULDER**, I PICK UP ON HER EVERY **WORD**. I TELL **HER** WHAT I TOLD **HIM**...

...BUT WHEN I GET TO THE PART WHERE I'M NOT A **MESSENGER** FROM THE **GODS**, JUST A GUY TRYING TO GET **HOME**...

...WELL, LET'S JUST SAY THAT NEWS DOESN'T GO **OVER** BIG. AT LEAST, I **THINK** THAT'S WHAT THAT LITTLE GLANCE MEANS.

THEN **BALDY** PIPES UP.

MY OWN MAGICS ARE AT WORK. YOU CAN COMPREHEND MY ***WORDS?***

LITTLE ***FUZZY***, BUT ***YEAH.***

YOU WISH TO RETURN FROM WHENCE YOU ***CAME***. PERHAPS I CAN ***ASSIST*** YOU.

NOW?

TONIGHT? NO. THERE ARE OTHER... MATTERS WHICH REQUIRE MY ATTENTION.

FUNNY. HE DOESN'T THINK I **NOTICE**, BUT WHEN HE **SAYS** THAT...

...IT'S NOT ME HE'S **LOOKING** AT.

WONDER WHAT OTHER SURPRISES I'LL HAVE T'DEAL WITH?

I MUST SAY, DARIUS, WHEREVER YOU MAY COME FROM...

...YOUR ARRIVAL HAS BEEN QUITE THE BENEFACTION.

IT SEEMS YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN MORE ABOUT MILITARY STRATEGY THAN MY MEN WILL EVER LEARN.

WITH YOUR HELP, THE GAREN SOIL WILL SOON BE OURS. IN FACT, I ALREADY HAVE MY EYE ON THE ONE THEY CALL TANIELLA.

SHE WILL MAKE AN EXQUISITE CONCUBINE. UNLESS YOU--?

Oh, HAVE HER. TAKE WHOMEVER YOU LIKE.

I'M NOT HERE FOR THAT.

JUST GIVE ME THE ONE CALLED BRATH.

GAIA-

UNION HOMEWORLD.

"...REPLY *IMMEDIATELY.*" ADD MY SIGNATURE.

HMM.

--TELL THE *COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER* I SAID *NOW.* AND SAY IT *LOUDER* TO THE DELASSIAN *TREASURY.*

SIR?

Oh. NOTHING, BONNI.

JUST OBSERVING *ZANNIATI.* FOR A DARK HORSE *POLITICO,* SHE'S PROVING HERSELF *ADMIRABLY...*

MR. PRESIDENT, SIR, OUR SOLDIERS HAVE *RETURNED.*

THE CREW OF THE *BITTERLUCK* HAS REQUESTED AN IMMEDIATE *AUDIENCE.*

MR. PRESIDENT... ZANNI...WE REGRET TO REPORT LOSSES IN EXCESS OF SIXTY PERCENT. AND THAT'S NOT *ALL.*

AND *SAM?*

ZANNI...

"...WE HAVE SOMETHING TO *TELL* YOU..."

...

I SEE. SIR, HOW QUICKLY CAN WE ENACT OUR ***CONTINGENCY PROTOCOLS?***

WITH THIS MUCH OF THE FLEET ***GONE?*** NOT ***NEAR*** SOON ENOUGH TO SHIELD ***DELASSIA,*** ZANNI.

THEN HAVE YOUR STAFF ALERT MY ***PEOPLE.*** TELL THEM TO PREPARE FOR A ***FULL SAURIAN ATTACK*** EFFECTIVE ***IMMEDIATELY.***

THEY'LL NEED ME HOME TO SET UP AND COORDINATE ***SUPPLY LINES.*** I'LL BE IN ***TOUCH.***

LISTEN TO HER. TOTAL CONTROL. NOT A ***WAVERING NOTE IN*** THAT VOICE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO ***TELL*** YOU, MR. PRESIDENT.

"SHE'S A ***TOUGH*** ONE."

DI VITO
MAGMA
-Ed/for-
Acrossley

Brath Mac Garen

Hunter turned warrior, Brath uses the might of his sigil to unite the tribes of his land against any and all invaders. The glow of his newfound brand allows him to anticipate the strategy of any enemy, making him nearly unbeatable. Pin-up art by Andrea Di Vito with inks by John Dell and Rick Magyar and colors by Andrew Crossley.

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I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE **CARNAGE**, COMMANDER REY.

THE **SAURIAN FLEET** IS INTENT ON REDUCING THE PLANET **KAYSEECAY** TO A **SMOKING CRATER**. HOW MANY CRAFT HAVE THEY **DEPLOYED?**

WELL, LET'S SEE, MR. PRESIDENT. THERE'S -- WAIT --
-- THERE'S --
OH, HELL. WHADDAYA KNOW?
I KEEP LOSIN' COUNT!
YEEEEHAAA!
THERE'S THE FLEET LEADER. THINK HE SEES YOU?
YEAH. GIVE HIM A SECOND TO RELAY THE NEWS THAT SAMANDAHL REY IS ON THE SCENE. THAT'LL SEND THE REST RUNNIN'.
THREE...TWO... ONE...

...NOW.

THANKS. THREAT ***NEUTRALIZED***, MR. PRESIDENT.

THOOM

*SAY IT **AGAIN**, SAM. YOU'RE OPEN **ACROSS ALL UNION FREQUENCIES.***

*OUR MEN ARE LISTENING BECAUSE THEY'RE GETTING HIT **HARD** AND THEY NEED TO HEAR FROM **YOU**. WHERE **ARE** WE? WHAT'S THE GOOD **WORD**?*

FROM THE TOP, SIR...

"...***TCHLUSARUD*** IS RACING ***KHYRADON*** TO FIND LOSER'S MOTHER. KHYRADON THOUGHT HE GRABBED THE ***THRONE*** BY KILLING THE OLD BROAD, BUT WE HAVE... ***INFORMATION*** THAT SHE'S ***ALIVE***.

"WE MAY BE ABLE TO MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF THAT IF WE CAN ***PLAY*** IT RIGHT.

"***ZANNIATI'S*** SET UP AN UNDERGROUND SUPPLY NETWORK ON ***DELASSIA***. THEIR IMPORTS HAVE BEEN CUT OFF BY THE SAURIANS TO KEEP DELASSIA FROM CRANKING OUT MORE SUPER***ARC*** DRIVES -- BUT THAT WON'T STOP ***ZANNI***.

"***JeMERIK MEER*** IS WITH ***ME***, AND WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO ***BREJHUR*** NEXT, TO BACK OUR SOLDIERS ***THERE***. IF YOU'RE ***LISTENING***, BOYS -- BE READY TO ***RALLY***. OVER AND ***OUT***."

"YEEE*HAA*"?

IT SOUNDED LIKE SOMETHING HE WOULD *SAY*.

I GET TO WRITE SAM'S *DIALOGUE*, NOT *YOU*. I'VE *KNOWN* HIM LONGER. *THAT'S* NOT THE *CHALLENGE*.

THE *CHALLENGE* IS KEEPING UP THE *MASQUERADE*. JeMERIK, I'M NOT CERTAIN HOW LONG I *CAN*.

AND YET, YOU DON'T DARE *STOP*.

OF *COURSE* NOT. *SOMEONE* HAS TO MAINTAIN THE ILLUSION. YOU *HEARD* THE *PRESIDENT*. THE UNION IS LOSING BADLY ENOUGH *ALREADY*.

IF OUR TROOPS KNEW THEIR *FIELD COMMANDER*--AND, PROBABLY, THEIR ONLY REAL HOPE OF *VICTORY*--WAS *D*--

--WAS *MISSING*--WELL, THAT'S NOT EXACTLY A *PEP RALLY*. WORSE, IF THE *SAURIANS* FIGURE IT OUT, THEY'LL GET EVEN *MORE* FEARLESS.

SAM...SAM, I WANT TO *BELIEVE* YOU'RE *OUT* THERE SOMEWHERE...

...BUT *WHERE...?*

THAT...

...IS AN *EXCELLENT* QUESTION.

WHAT A PERFECTLY *DREADFUL* CASE OF *BATTLEUS INTERRUPTUS.*

FEELING *UNFULFILLED,* YALA?

THIS IS WHAT *HAPPENS* WHEN YOU USE THE *LITTLE PEOPLE* AS YOUR *GAME PIECES*. *SWEAR* TO ME YOU DIDN'T MAKE HIM DISAPPEAR ON *PURPOSE*.

AS I'VE *TOLD* YOU, TRENIN, I SIMPLY WENT TO REMOVE HIM FROM THE *PLAYING FIELD*.

WHO COULD KNOW HOW THAT RAGGED DOUBLE-SIGIL ON HIS CHEST WOULD *FLARE* AND BLINK HIM AWAY TO *ALTWAAL KNOWS WHERE?*

I TAKE IT YOU HAD NO LUCK *TRACKING* HIM?

WHEN I *SPEAK*, IS IT JUST *NOISE* TO YOU? AS I HAVE *SAID*-- *REPEATEDLY*-- REY IS THE ONE SIGIL-BEARER *NONE* OF THE FIRST CAN TRACK-- MEANING HE COULD BE *ANYWHERE*.

BY *ALTWAAL'S EYES*, WOMAN, FOR ALL *WE* KNOW, HE COULD BE WAITING TO *AMBUSH* YOU IN YOUR *BEDCHAMBERS!*

REALLY?

NO. AT LEAST REASSURE ME THAT YOU'RE KEEPING AN EYE ON YOUR *OWN* CHAMPION. WHAT IS *HE* UP TO?

Oh. *KHYRADON?*

"...HE'S SO *CLINGY*..."

GODDESS *KHYALHTUA*... *HEAR* MY *PRAYERS!* THIS, I *BEG* OF YOU!

AND STILL, MY PLEAS FALL ON *DEAF EARS*. HAVE I *ERRED* IN YOUR *BIDDING*, DEAR KHYALHTUA?

HAVE I DONE SOMETHING TO MAKE YOU *ABANDON* YOUR MOST *LOYAL SERVANT*...?

IF YOU'LL *FORGIVE* ME, SIR...

...HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THAT SHE DOES *NOT* SHUN YOU? THAT YOU ARE SO *POWERFUL* NOW, SO UTTERLY *MASTERFUL*...

...THAT SHE *HIDES* FROM YOU?

MMMPH!

HOW *SAD* FOR YOU THAT YOU FEEL THE NEED TO--

--TO--

--TO WORSHIP SUCH A *COWARDLY GODDESS*. YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY *RIGHT!*

KHYALHTUA *CRINGES* BEFORE THE *TRUE* LORD OF THE *SAURIAN RACE!*

SHE *FEARS* ME! SHE *FEARS* ME WHILE I *MYSELF*--

"--HAVE *NOTHING* TO FEAR!"

WHERE--?

THERE! AFTER HIM!

REMARKABLE. THE ONE PLACE IN THE *UNIVERSE* TCHLUSARUD ABSOLUTELY SHOULD *NOT* BE--

--AND YET, HERE HE *IS,* STINKING UP THE *PLANET.*

TKKK. NO ONE EVER SAID HE WAS *BRIGHT.*

HE DOESN'T EVEN HAVE HIS *MOMMY* AROUND TO *PROTECT* HIM ANYMORE.

I HEAR SHE NEVER LIKED HIM IN THE *FIRST* PLACE. *TRUE?*

IT DOESN'T MATTER.

SHE'S STILL MY MOTHER.

SNAPSHOT

AND WHEREVER SHE HIDES, KHYRADON HASN'T YET ***FOUND*** HER -- AS EVIDENCED BY THE FACT SHE'S NOT HANGING FROM A ***PIKE*** SOMEWHERE ***PROMINENT.***

WE BOTH KNOW SHE MAY HOLD THE KEY TO YOUR ***DEFEAT,*** KHYRADON, NOW THAT ***SAMANDAHL REY*** IS DEAD -- OR, AT THE ***VERY LEAST*** --

"--SOMEWHERE *ELSE.*"

NO.

NO.

NO.

NO.

ANX TOIA MORE
AONGER TEN IC
NOT NEFER HAC
CTARTED+

THERE. I JUST TOLD THEM, "ANY FIGHT THAT LASTS MORE THAN *TEN SECONDS*...

"...IS A FIGHT YOU NEVER SHOULD HAVE *STARTED.*" I *THINK.*

EITHER THAT, OR I SAID THEIR PANTS EAT CHEESE.

HRNG

HMG

AND *YOU!* YOU'RE JUST STANDING HERE *WATCHING?*

HRNG

"HE CAID, "XOY'RE A MORON."

OH, AIKE XOY YNDERCTAND.

LISTEN TO ME! IF THIS WERE REAL COMBAT, YOU'D BE SCOPING FOR *HIDDEN ENEMIES!*

IF THIS WERE *REAL* COMBAT--

SHHKKK

!

AHA!

--YOU'D BE *DEAD.*

THYMTT

THEIR LEADER **BRATH** GETS IT. I HAVE NO CLUE WHY HE AND **I** CAN COMMUNICATE, OTHER'N THE FACT HE SPORTS A BRAND LIKE **MINE**...FOR REASONS **NEITHER** OF US CAN DOPE OUT.

AROUND HERE, QUESTIONS OUTNUMBER **ANSWERS** A HUNDRED TO **ONE**. ALL I KNOW FOR **SURE** IS THAT BRATH'S ARMY IS IN **TROUBLE**.

I AM *IMPRESSED,* SAM. IN JUST UNDER THREE *NIGHTFALLS,* YOU HAVE TAUGHT MY MEN *MUCH* ABOUT YOUR WAYS OF COMBAT.

I KNOW A FEW TRICKS. READY TO *RIDE?*

YES. I WISH TO SEE THE SCOPE OF THE *ENEMY* WITH MY *OWN EYES.*

IT IS GOOD TO HAVE AN *ALLY,* SAM. DO YOU SUPPOSE THERE ARE *OTHERS* OUT THERE... *LIKE* US?

DUNNO. THE UNIVERSE IS PRETTY DAMN *BIG,* BRATH. TAKE IT FROM SOMEBODY WHO'S POKED *AROUND* UP THERE.

UP...?

IN THE *STARS?* YOU'VE TRAVELED THE *STARS?* HOW? *WHEN?*

OKAY... I TOLD YOU I'VE BEEN A SOLDIER, RIGHT...?

FOR THE NEXT HOUR OR SO, I **YAMMER** ABOUT MY ARMY **CAREER**. TO HIS **CRED**, BRATH LISTENS **PATIENTLY** EVEN WHEN HE DOESN'T QUITE **GET** IT.

EVEN WHEN **I** DON'T QUITE GET IT.

...OVERSTAYED MY ***WELCOME*** BY ABOUT ***TWO YEARS,*** GIVE OR TAKE. DON'T GET ME ***WRONG***. IT'S NOT A BAD PLACE T'***WORK***...

...IT'S JUST THAT, AS TIME WENT BY, THE ***SAURIANS*** GOT T'BE MORE AND MORE ***FRUSTRATING*** TO THE ***HIGH COMMAND***... A PROBLEM THEY COULDN'T ***SOLVE***...

...SO THEY'D TURN ON ***US,*** LOOKIN' FOR "PROBLEMS" THEY ***COULD*** SOLVE. HUMAN ***NATURE***. GAVE 'EM THE ILLUSION OF ***CONTROL*** T'GO LOOKIN' FOR ***CRISES***. DON'T KNOW ***WHY*** I COULDN'T JUST LET IT ROLL ***OFF***...

...BUT WHEN ***BUDGET CUTS*** COST MY MEN SOME ***DUE PROMOTIONS,*** I HIT THE ***ROOF***. ROIYA SAYS WE WERE ***MUSTERED OUT***. I SAY I ***QUIT***. WE'RE ***STILL*** ARGUING ***THAT*** POINT.

ANYWAY, A COUPLE YEARS GO ***BY,*** AND ***BOOM***...I GET THIS ***SIGIL*** PLANTED ON ME. SPEAKING OF ***WHICH***... ***SAVAL,*** YOU SAID YOU MIGHT HAVE SOME ***INFO...?***

BALDY THE **PHILOSOPHER** HAS HIS OWN "MAGICKS," AS HE PUTS IT, TO BRIDGE THE **LANGUAGE GAP**, AND I LISTEN **HARD**. I **WANNA** LEARN ABOUT THIS...

THIS ***INSIGNIA***...CLEARLY, IT IS BESTOWED UPON THOSE WITH GREAT ***POTENTIAL***.

O-KAY... ...

WAIT. THAT'S ***IT?*** THAT'S YOUR ***INFORMATION?***

NO. IT IS MY ***OBSERVATION. HERE*** IS MY INFORMATION. ARE YOU ***PREPARED?***

ABSOLUTELY.

THEN LISTEN ***CLOSELY*** AND ***CAREFULLY,*** SAMANDAHL REY. I WILL SPEAK ***ONE WORD. ONE CRUCIAL WORD*** THAT IS THE SUMMATION OF ALL THAT ***WAS, IS,*** AND ***WILL BE.***

"BALANCE."

WELL. DON'T I FEEL LIKE A GENIUS NOW.

OH, FOR THE LOVE OF --

I HATE TO **ADMIT** IT, BUT I'D GOTTEN MY **HOPES** UP. I'M WORRIED FOR MY **FRIENDS,** AND I ASSUMED CHROMEDOME THE BIG-TALKER COULD TELL ME HOW TO GET **BACK** TO THEM.

FRANKLY, THAT'S WHY I'VE BEEN HANGING **AROUND.**

WELL, IT'S BEEN A ROYAL **WASTE.** I HAVE MY **OWN** WAR TO FIGHT. I'LL LET **BRATH'S** MEN TAKE IT FROM **HERE.**

HELL, THERE'RE ALMOST A **HUNDRED** OF 'EM. THEY'LL BE MORE THAN A MATCH FOR **ANY**--

GOD OF THE *HUNT*...

THIS...

...THIS IS BAD.

GO! *GO!* WE HAVE TO GET BACK AND WARN YOUR *MEN*--

"--BEFORE WE'RE *SPOTTED!*"

WHAT IS IT, DARIUS? I KNOW *FAR* BETTER THAN TO IGNORE YOUR *INTUITION* BY *NOW.* YOU'RE *ON TO* SOMETHING.

INDEED. THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE VERY *AIR,* GENERAL RONACUS...

...THE VAGUEST *WHIFF* OF THE PREY I *SEEK.*

LET US *RIDE.*

ΕΦΕΡΧΟΝΕ ΓΑΤΗΕΡ ΤΟΓΕΤΗΕΡ ΝΟΩ+

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TRANSLATION: WE'RE SCREWED.

AGREED, TANIELLA. AS UNTHINKABLE AS IT ***SOUNDS***, WE MUST ***RETREAT***. I CANNOT LET MY OWN ***PRIDE*** COST THESE MEN THEIR ***LIVES***.

GANTH, HORNOTH... GATHER OUR ***STEEDS*** AND OUR ***SUPPLIES*** AND DO IT ***NOW***.

GANTH?

TOO LATE.

I PUT THE COUNT AT ABOUT **FIVE HUNDRED.**

FIVE TO **ONE.** SUDDENLY, I WISH MORE THAN **EVER** I WAS BACK HOME FIGHTING THE **SAURIANS.**

THE **ODDS** WERE BETTER.

DELASSIA

MADAME AMBASSADOR, THE UNDERGROUND JUST DECRYPTED THIS SAURIAN ***EMBARGO ORDER***. YOU NEED TO READ IT...

...AND I WISH I KNEW A WORD MORE URGENT THAN "IMMEDIATELY."

A RATION ON ***COMMON NETERIUM?*** BUT THAT'S ***CRUCIAL*** TO THE SUPER***ARC***'S ***FUNCTIONALITY!*** IT'S AS IF THEY ***KNEW*** THAT-- BUT ***HOW?***

IT'S A ***BLOW,*** AGREED. THE SAURIANS ARE ENACTING SOME PRETTY BAFFLING ***STRATEGIES.***

REPORTEDLY, THEIR NEW ***MINISTER OF TRADE*** IS ABOUT TO TELECAST AN ADDRESS TO THE OVERGROUND DELASSIANS -- THOSE LEFT ALIVE, AT LEAST.

I'LL RIG THE ***VIEWSCREEN*** TO RECEIVE THE BROADCAST. MAYBE WE CAN ***LEARN*** SOMETHING.

I DON'T--

IT'S AS IF THE SAURIANS ARE GOING OUT OF THEIR ***WAY*** TO DENY US CRITICAL SUPER***ARC*** SUPPLIES -- BUT THAT MAKES ***NO SENSE.***

THE ONLY WAY THEY COULD SINGLE OUT SUCH OTHERWISE-INNOCUOUS ***COMPONENTS*** WOULD BE TO ***OBTAIN*** A DRIVE -- BUT ***HOW?*** WHO AMONG THEM COULD BE ***CLEVER*** ENOUGH TO--

*--PROUD TO AT LAST ANNOUNCE MY **FULL** AND UNCONDITIONAL **ALLIANCE** WITH TOMORROW'S **GALACTIC LEADERS.***

*AS MINISTER OF **TRADE,** I CAN BRING THE DELASSIANS TO THEIR **KNEES** --AND I **WILL** --*

--STARTING WITH THE FAMILY ORIBATTA.

RONOLO.

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THIS IS NOT HOW ANY OF US WANTED TO DIE.

LONG-HAIRED GUY'S NAME IS **BRATH,** LEADER OF A TRIBE CALLED GAREN.

HE'S GOT A **SIGIL** THAT AMPS HIS **COMMUNICATION** SKILLS.

RIGHT **NOW,** THAT AND A **DEUTRUM COIN'LL** GET YOU A CUP OF KOJU.

THE WOMAN WHO COULD BREAK YOU IN HALF IS **TANIELLA.**

SHE'S BRATH'S **GIRLFRIEND.**

THEY'RE NOT ON A **DATE.**

AND **ME?** I'M JUST AN IDIOT WHO'S MADE A **CAREER** OUT OF BEING IN THE **WRONG PLACE** AT THE **WRONG TIME.**

DON'T HAVE **CLUE ONE** HOW I GOT **HERE,** BUT SINCE I **POPPED IN,** I'VE BEEN WORKIN' WITH BRATH TRYIN' TA KEEP HIS TRIBE SAFE FROM AN **INVADING ARMY.**

IT'S NOT GOING WELL.

WHEN THEY CAME OVER THE **HORIZON**, THEY OUTNUMBERED US **FIVE TO ONE**. WE'VE SHAVED THE **ODDS** SINCE THEN --

-- BUT NOT HARDLY **ENOUGH**.

WELL, **GREAT**.

OUR BIG **PLUS** IS **MY** SIGIL. IT GIVES ME **CONTROL** OVER **INANIMATE MATTER**, BUT IT TAKES **CONCENTRATION**--

HEY. WHADDAYA CALL THREE **ENEMY SOLDIERS** UNDER A MOUNTAIN OF **ROCKS**?

A GOOD **START**.

--SO I'VE GOTTA PICK MY **MOMENTS**.

NO GREAT **LOSS** ON THE **SWORD**. SHARP AS A **LOOGEY** AND ALL THE BALANCE OF A **LOG**.

THIS...

...THIS IS MORE LIKE IT.

THEY CALL HIM **DARIUS**. I CALL HIM **TROUBLE**.

CAN WE ***WRAP THIS UP?*** I'VE GOT A ***GIRL*** T'GO HOME TO!

...TO...

...***TWO***...

YOU BEAR THE BRAND AS ***WELL?*** THERE ARE ***TWO*** OF YOU?

YEAH? SO WHAT'S IT TO Y--

WHILE I'VE BEEN PLAYING A **NUMBERS** GAME, BRATH HAS BEEN DOING THE **HEAVY LIFTING** -- GETTING HIS **ASS** KICKED BY SOME **PITUITARY** CASE WITH A **SHOESHINE HAT**.

CRAP. THAT **APOSTROPHE** THING. HIS SYMBOL. I'VE SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT **BEFORE.**

WHERE? SOMETHIN'S **SCREAMIN'** IN MY HEAD THAT IT'S **IMPORTAN--**

NO MATTER. TWO *FOES?*

TWO *FISTS.*

FWAM

GET UP. GET **UP.**

THIS IS NOT...HOW **ANY** OF US WANTED...TO **DIE.**

PARTICULARLY...**ME.**

PROMISED **ZANNI** I'D...COME **HOME...** TO HER. DAMN IT.

I THINK I LIED...

...YOU STINKING BAG OF ***PUSTULENCE!***

NOW, ***ZANNI***... IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK TO YOUR ***HUSBAND?***

I KNOW, I ***KNOW***... ***EX***-HUSBAND. BUT WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE THE ***MEMORIES,*** WON'T WE?

ME, THE SULTAN OF A PLEASURE WORLD... YOU, IN YOUR HAREM SILKS, SERVICING ME WITH ALL THE GRACE AND BEAUTY OF A ***SPY.***

KARMAGRAM FOR ***ZANNI ORIBATTA***. AS TCHARUN'S NEW MINISTER OF ***TRADE,*** I CONTROL ***COMMERCE LINES*** -- SO IF YOU'RE PLANNING ON ***CONTINUING*** TO BUILD ANTI-SAURIAN ***DEVICES,*** I CAN'T ***IMAGINE*** WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE ***SUPPLIES.***

IN FACT, I'M MAKING IT MY ***MISSION*** TO ENSURE THAT YOUR LITTLE ***UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE*** GETS ***FULLY BURIED.***

DOES HE REALLY HAVE THAT KIND OF POWER?

IN THAT POSITION? YES.

I'M THE ONE YOU ***WANT,*** RONOLO. LET THESE PEOPLE ***WALK***...

...AND I'LL ***SURRENDER.***

GIVE YOURSELF UP ***VOLUNTARILY?***

I DON'T REALLY THINK THAT WILL BE ***NECESSARY***...

THOOMTHOOM

ELSEWHERE.

SAURIAN PRISON CAMP
CHUSLAKAK.

<THIS IS HIGHLY IRREGULAR.>

I'M NOT USED TO HAVING APES DELIVERED ONE AT A TIME. LET ME SEE YOUR MANIFEST.>

<IT'S...IT'S RIGHT H-HERE...>

<WHY THE STAMMER, SOLDIER? AND WHERE IN THE NAME OF KHYALHTUA IS YOUR SIDEARM?>

<IT-- IT-->

<-- IT'S A TRAP! RUN, SIR! RUN!>

HE'S RUNNIN'. DAMN.

I COULDA MADE A PERFECTLY GOOD PAIRA SHOES OUTTA HIM...

YO, SAMMY! JONS MITH, SUPERSPY! I'M IN, BUT I NEED BACKUP, BRO!

GHAA—

YOU'RE COVERED.

SAMMY! JUST INNA NICK OF --

ROIYA?

IN THE ELECTRONIC *FLESH.* TRANSMITTED STRAIGHT FROM *STATION BITTERLUCK* IN KINDA-LIVING *COLOR!*

GOT NO PROBLEM WITH *THAT,* 'LONG AS YOU WANNA TELL ME HOW A *HOLOGRAM* C'N PACK *HEAT.*

=KOFF=

Oh, YEAH...

Umm... A LITTLE TRICK FROM THE GUY NAMED JeMERIK ABOARD THE *SHIP,* JONS!

YOU KNOW, THE GUY WHOSE POWERS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE A *SECRET,* ROI. MAYBE THIS *WASN'T* A GREAT IDEA...

WHAT?

NOTHING! JUST GET THE *GATE* OPEN --

SAMMY, MAN, YOU THERE?

SAMMY, GET THEM BAY DOORS OPEN!

YOU HEARD THE LADY! LET'S HUSTLE!

COI! COI!

--MORE THAN IT HURTS ME!

'CAUSE I CAN'T FEEL IT. I MISS FLESH AND BLOOD...

KRUNK

--WORRY ABOUT THE TRANSPORTATION! HEY, GUESS WHAT? THIS IS GOING TO HURT YOU--

--LET ME--

-- AND --

SOMEBODY CALLED FOR A *RIDE?*

LAUGH IT *UP,* MISTER SAFE-INSIDE-THE-*SHIP.*

ONE PRISON CAMP *LIBERATED*... *NINETEEN* TO *GO.*

THIS *SUCKS.*

KNOW WHAT *ELSE* SUCKS, DUDE?

THAT *SAMMY* AIN'T NOWHERE IN *SIGHT* ON HIS *OWN SHIP.* I WANNA KNOW WHAT'S *UP.*

WE MAY AS WELL *TELL* HIM, ROIYA. AWAY FROM THE *EAVESDROPPERS,* AT LEAST.

OKAY, JONS. YOU'RE *RIGHT.* SAM'S *NOT* HERE.

DURING THAT FIRST FIGHT WITH *KHYRADON,* SOMETHING... *HAPPENED.*

EVER *SINCE, I'VE* BEEN THE ACTING UNION FIELD COMMANDER.

WHAT? BUT WE BEEN TAKIN' HIS *ORDERS* ALL *ALONG--!*

MY ORDERS. TWEAK SOME *ELECTRONS* AND I CAN *PASS* FOR SAM IN *LOOKS* AND *VOICE*... AND I'VE *HAD* TO

KHYRADON'S LEADING A *WINNING ARMY.* WE'VE BEEN GETTING *SLAUGHTERED* -- AND NEWS LIKE THIS WOULD DESTROY WHAT LITTLE MORALE THE UNION FORCES *MAINTAIN.* SO IT STAYS OUR SECRET. *AGREED?*

NOT 'TIL YOU TELL ME WHERE SAMMY *IS.*

I WISH I *COULD,* JONS. BUT AGAINST HIS *WILL,* SAM JUST... *VANISHED.* WE HAVE *NO IDEA* WHERE HE IS...OR, TO BE *BLUNT...*

...WHETHER HE'S EVEN *STILL ALIVE.*

SIGIL-BEARERS. NOW THEY'RE *CONGREGATING.*

MY PEOPLE WANT SOME ***ANSWERS*** ABOUT YOUR KIND. YOU'RE A LITTLE TOO ***UNPREDICTABLE*** TO CART AROUND LIKE ***SPECIMENS*** --

--SO PERHAPS I SHOULD SETTLE FOR TAKING THE MOST ***PERTINENT PART*** OF YOU FOR STUDY. TELL ME--

--DOES THIS COME *OFF?*

NNYAAAGGH!

STOP! YOUR FIGHT IS WITH *ME!*

KSSSH

"FIGHT."

THAT IMPLIES ***OPPOSITION.*** TRY ***SHOWING*** SOME.

BRATH--!

*NO GOOD. CAN'T... EVEN...HEAR **MYSELF**...!*

*WHERE HAVE I...**SEEN** THAT... SYMBOL...?*

*MIGHT **REMEMBER**... IF I COULD CLEAR MY **HEAD**...*

<SPLENDID. WITH **DARIUS** AT OUR SIDE, WE ARE **UNBEATABLE!**>

<MEN --VICTORY O'ER THE **HEATHENS** IS **UPON** US!>

<FILL THE **AIR** WITH THEIR **SCREAMS!** WASH THE **SOIL** WITH THEIR **BLOOD!** THIS LAND IS **OURS!**>

I DON'T KNOW THE **LANGUAGE**, BUT I CAN **GUESS** WHAT HE'S **SAYING**. THIS WAR'S ABOUT **TERRITORY**. YOU WANT **LAND?**

I'LL GIVE YOU **LAND.**

<KILL THEM! KILL THEM ALL AND -->

SHACHOOM

AND THAT QUITE LITERALLY LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD.

WE'VE GOT A REAL CHANCE--

--ESPECIALLY SINCE MY MEMORY FINALLY KICKED IN.

BRATH! GET UP! WE'VE BEEN USIN' THE WRONG WEAPONS!

THAT'S BECAUSE THERE IS NO RIGHT ONE, YOU EVOLUTIONARY BOTTOM-FEEDER. WHAT COULD YOU POSSIBLY THROW AT ME NOW?

THIS.

NNNNNGGHH!

YOU--
--WHAT HAVE YOU--
--WHAT ARE YOU?

THAT'S WHAT I *THOUGHT*. I *HAVE* SEEN THAT COMMA DOOHICKEY BEFORE--ON A FELLA NAMED *TRENIN*. LIKE *DARIUS* HERE, A *MOUNTAIN* OF A *GUY*--

--BUT SOMETHIN' ABOUT MY *SIGIL* LET ME SUCK HIS POWER *AWAY*.

THEN *TWO* SIGILS --

--SHOULD *DOUBLE* THE FUN. FEEL THE *ENERGY*?

YES. *YES*.

THEN *REEL IT IN!*

GHAAAAH!

ONE...

...ONE, I CAN *TOLERATE.* *TWO* OF YOU...

YOU. THE *STRANGER.*

BE *GONE.*

?

NO! *NOT NOW!*

*WHATEVER HE'S **POUNDIN'** ME WITH... FEELS LIKE **BEFORE**... WHEN I 'PORTED AWAY FROM **HOME**...*

*...WHICH COULD BE **GOOD**... IF THE TIMIN' DIDN'T **STINK!***

BRATH! DON'T LET *UP!* HE'S *LOSIN'* IT!

HE'LL *RETREAT!* THERE'LL BE A BIG *FLASH* OF *LIGHT* AND HE'LL *BACK OFF!*

HE'S AFRAID OF YOU, BRATH!

HE'S **AFRAID** *OF YOU!*

GOOD.

A FULL *SURRENDER.*

THEY THINK THEY SAW YOU SLAY *DARIUS* WITH ONE BLOW OF AN *AXE.*

THEY LAID DOWN THEIR WEAPONS *IMMEDIATELY.*

WE'LL CONCERN OURSELVES WITH THE PRISONERS *LATER.* IT'S THEIR *LEADER* WHO MUST BE... *DEALT* WITH.

FILTHY *SAVAGE!* GO AHEAD! *EXECUTE* ME! DO IT *QUICKLY*-- FOR YOUR *OWN* SAKE!

MY *MEN*-- IF THEY CAN BE *CALLED* "*MEN*"-- MAY BE CONTENT TO SURRENDER LIKE *COWARDS,* BUT NOT *I!*

YOU'VE NO *CHOICE* BUT TO *SLAY* ME! LET ME *LIVE,* AND I *SWEAR* TO YOU I WILL FIND MY WAY *FREE*--

--FREE TO LEAD *MORE* TROOPS HERE, AND *MORE BESIDES,* UNTIL YOUR KIND IS *WIPED FROM THE FACE OF THE*--

THAP

THERE IS A ***DIFFERENCE*** BETWEEN WAR AND MURDER... AND NO MATTER HOW ***LOUDLY*** THE FALLEN MAY CRY FOR ***VENGEANCE,*** I CANNOT SANCTION THE ***LATTER.***

NEITHER, HOWEVER, CAN I RISK THAT YOU MIGHT SOMEDAY USE YOUR SKILLS AS A ***COMMANDER*** TO BRING WAR ***ANEW.***

OF ***LATE,*** I HAVE BECOME QUITE ***VERSED*** IN THE SKILL OF ***COMMUNICATION,*** AND THIS I HAVE LEARNED ABOVE ***ALL ELSE:***

A LEADER OF MEN CANNOT SIMPLY BE ***SEEN.***

HE MUST BE ***HEARD.***

SO WE *WON.*

I NEVER DOUBTED THAT WE *WOULD.*

THE GODS DO NOT SEND US *GIFTS* ANTICIPATING OUR *FAILURE.*

IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK THE STRANGER WAS?

A BOON FROM THE *HEAVENS?* A *REWARD* FOR FAITH *DEFENDED?*

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT DESPITE HIS *POWER*...DESPITE HIS *KNOWLEDGE*... HE WAS JUST A *MAN?*

WE'LL LIKELY NEVER *KNOW.* BUT I *WILL* TELL YOU *THIS.*

ALL HE *TAUGHT* US... ALL HE *DID* FOR US... *WHOEVER* HE WAS, TANIELLA...

"...HE WAS *NEVER* 'JUST' *ANYONE*."

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IT'S DEADLY COLD, BUT JUST FOR A SECOND.

AS DARIUS' BLAST ZAPS ME AWAY FROM BRATH'S WORLD --

I'M THINKING MAYBE I'VE BEEN SET UPON THE PATH **HOME**...

...BUT IT APPEARS THAT'S NOT THE CASE.

THE GIRL'S A SURPRISE. OUR LOCATION'S A BIGGER ONE.

TWO THOUGHTS HIT ME RIGHT OFF.

ONE, SHE'S **MARKED.**

SHE'S GOT A MINIATURE OF THE SAME SIGIL AS BRATH MAC GAREN...

...WHICH LOOKS SOMEWHAT LIKE MY SCAR.

THOUGHT TWO.

GRAVITY DOESN'T SEEM TO AFFECT HER...

...ALTHOUGH IT AFFECTS ME JUST FINE.

THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME T'THINK STRATEGY.

SO I JUST REACH OUT AND GRAB WHAT HELP I CAN.

THESE SHIPS--AND I DON'T HAVE THE FREE MINUTE T'WONDER WHY THEY'RE NOT IN THE WATER--

--HAVE JUST ENOUGH'A THE KINDA MASS--METAL, STONE, ANYTHING NOT LIVING--I CAN WORK WITH T'PROVIDE ME WITH A LIFELINE.

WHICH I DON'T NEED 'CAUSE THE GIRL SHOWS UP TO SAVE MY CARCASS FROM GOIN' SPLAT ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE.

SHOWOFF.

WE NEED TO TALK.

OKAY, LITTLE GIRL -- JUST ***WHAT'S*** GOING ON HERE?

<WHO ARE YOU? HOW DID YOU JUST APPEAR--?>

CAN'T UNDER-STAND A WORD SHE'S SAYING.

I FIGURE SINCE BRATH AN' ME FOUND A WAY TO COMMUNICATE --

<HAS ILAHN SENT YOU?>

--IT'S WORTH TRYIN' T'MAKE THE CONNECTION HERE.

TRY TALKIN' T'ME ***NOW.***

HER FACE GOES BLANK FOR A SECOND.

I HEAR I'VE GOT THAT EFFECT ON WOMEN.

I CAN... HEAR YOU.

SHIPS... BETWEEN WORLDS?... A WARRIOR--ANOTHER WITH THE MARK?...THAT WOMAN YOU LOVE...

...***SAMANDAHL REY.***

JUST LIKE WITH BRATH, THERE'S A QUICK FLASH OF INFO--

SHE'S **SEPHIE,** AND SHE RULES A FLYIN' ISLAND CALLED **MERIDIAN.**

THOSE SHIPS ARE HER WORLD'S ONLY TRANSPORTS, AND HER CREW'S FIGHTING THE LEADER OF ANOTHER ISLAND.

WHO'S ALSO MARKED.

TWO OF 'EM?

YOUR MARK--

SAMANDAHL REY, DOES YOURS CREATE OR DESTROY?

JUST ***SAM,*** SEPHIE.

AN' I'D HAVETA SAY ***DESTRUCTION'S*** MY SPECIALTY.

HELPING OUT IS, TOO, AN' IT LOOKS LIKE YOUR TEAM'S LOSIN'.

C'N I HELP?

SHE SEEMS T'DECIDE I'M OKAY, SO I'M RECRUITED.

ILAHN, TOP DOG OF THE ISLAND OF CADADOR, SENT SOLDIERS T'BUST SEPHIE'S CREW.

CAUGHT 'EM AT THE END OF A FUNERAL ALL-NIGHTER HONORIN' PEOPLE KILLED WHEN ONE OF THE CITY-ISLANDS CRASHED.

I NEED T'DISABLE A WEAPON CALLED A SKYFIRE LAUNCHER.

BUT I DON'T SEE ANY WEAPONS.

JUST SOME SORRY-ASS ANTIQUES CALLIN' OUT T'BE RENDERED INTO SLAG--

INORGANIC, SO I C'N MORPH 'EM.

AN' A CATAPULT FULL OF SMOLDERING GLOP--

I'M THINKIN' THAT MUST BE THE SKYFIRE.

SO I FIGURE WHY STOP WITH THE LAUNCHER --

--WHEN I CAN TAKE THE WHOLE SHIP APART!

THAT SEEMS T'SLOW 'EM DOWN.

MAKES THE KID SPEED UP, THOUGH --

NOOO!

APPARENTLY, I'VE VIOLATED A LOCAL TABOO.

YOU CAN'T JUST *KILL* THEM!

WHAT KIND OF *WAR* YOU RUNNIN' HERE, LITTLE GIRL?

OH, **THIS** IS A JOKE AND A HALF!

PRINCESS PEACE DOESN'T WANT ANY NASTY **UGLY** IN HER CUTE LI'L WAR!

WOMEN...I ONLY KNOW ONE WHO MAKES ANY SENSE T'ME.

GAIAN SPACE

THAT'S THE LAST JUMP--

WE'VE REACHED GAIA.

NOW, LISTEN UP--

I KNOW WE'RE *ALL* OVERCROWDED AND STRESSED--

ALTHOUGH *SOME* OF US AREN'T SOLID ENOUGH TO *FEEL* IT--

SO HANG IN THERE. IT BEATS A SAURIAN PRISON CAMP.

WITH COMMUNICATIONS DOWN, I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANY--

AHEM...

SAMANDAHL REY CAN'T GIVE US ANY IDEA WHAT KIND OF RECEPTION TO EXPECT, BUT...UH... *SAM'S ORDERS* ARE TO MEET THE REST OF OUR SQUADRON AT CAPE ARSALA AND REASSIGN YOU FROM THERE.

WE'RE HEADING IN BLIND ON *REY'S* ORDERS?

WE'RE IN TROUBLE.

REMEMBER YOUR TRAINING, SOLDIER.

WE'LL GET ALL THE INTEL WE NEED WHEN WE TOUCH DOWN--

--JUST BE GLAD SAMANDAHL REY'S WITH US.

GLAD? AFTER WHAT HE DID TO THE GAIAN FLEET, MAYBE WE'D BE BETTER OFF BACK ON BREJHUR!

SERIOUSLY-- I'M GLAD TO HAVE THAT KIND OF POWER ON OUR SIDE.

GOOD THING SAM *IS* WITH US.

YEAH.

GOOD THING SAM REY'S *WITH* US, HUH?

JONS--!

GOOD THING *ONE* OF US IS A HOLOGRAM WHO CAN PLAY THE ROLE OF SAM, RIGHT?

YEAH, SAMANDAHL REY'S WITH US-- BUT WHERE?

I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM ON BOARD.

SAM... STEPPED OUTSIDE.

HELP ME OUT HERE, JeMERIK!

I'M SURE THAT SAM'S OFF WORKING OUT NEW WAYS TO USE THAT POWER OF HIS.

OH? SOUNDS LIKE YOU KNOW MORE THAN YOU'VE BEEN TELLING ME.

ANYTHING YOU WANT TO *SHARE?*

TIME OUT.

NOW, ROIYA-- I LOVE YOU MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, BUT THE GAME WOULDN'T BE AS INTERESTING IF I GAVE YOU ALL THE ANSWERS, WOULD IT?

MAYBE.

YOU COULD START WITH GIVING ME *ONE* AND SEE HOW IT FEELS.

SAM'S TOO STUBBORN TO GIVE UP AND TOO HARD TO KILL.

HE'LL FIND A WAY HOME AS SOON AS HE'S LEARNED WHAT HE NEEDS TO DO TO ACCOMPLISH IT.

AS SOON AS HE'S LEARNED--!

JeMERIK!

IT'S NOT LIKE THE BET BETWEEN US, IS IT?

OH, NO, IT'S NOT THAT AT ALL. WHAT I SHARE WITH YOU, I DON'T SHARE WITH OTHERS.

I DIDN'T MAKE SAM DISAPPEAR....

...BUT MAYBE I DID TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY...

"...TO *SEE* WHAT HE WOULD DO!"

THE BAD GUYS BACK OFF, GIVING US A CHANCE FOR CONVERSATION.

SO MAYBE IT'S JUST ME, BUT NOBODY ELSE SEEMS T'FIND THE LITTLE OLD LADY WATCHING DOWN ON US STRANGE.

WHAT'S STRANGER IS THE WAY SHE REMINDS ME OF JeMERIK MEER.

BUT I'M BUSY MAKIN' FRIENDS AN' IMPRESSIN' THE LOCALS, SO I LET IT GO.

--AN' I'M TELLIN' YOU, YOU CAN'T MAKE ANY REAL PROGRESS FIGHTIN' LIKE THIS!

ALL YOU'VE BEEN DOIN' IS TOYIN' WITH 'EM! *PLAYING* PIRATES!

YOU GOTTA SHOW 'EM YOU MEAN BUSINESS!

TAKE SOMETHIN' THIS ILAHN WANTS AND *BLOW IT UP!*

THOSE SHIPS -- THEY'RE VALUABLE TO HIM, RIGHT?

I'M *GLAD* NO ONE ELSE CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR RIDICULOUS PLAN!

I CAN'T BLOW UP HIS SHIPS!

THE SAILORS ABOARD THEM WOULD *DIE!*

AN' WE CAN'T HAVE *THAT!*

EXCUSE ME! I THOUGHT YOU SAID ***HE*** DROPPED A WHOLE ***ISLAND?***

SOUNDS T'ME LIKE PEOPLE ARE ALREADY DYING!

TIME T'GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD.

I'M A SOLDIER, NOT A POLITICIAN.

YOU GONNA ***END*** THIS OR YOU GONNA STAY PRETTY?

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO GIVE A SLICK SPEECH.

I DON'T CARE T'KNOW.

I'VE JUST GOT THINGS T'SAY.

SO I SAY 'EM.

PWOOOOOSH!

<SKYFIRE!>

GET INTERRUPTED BY A FRESH SALVO FROM THE ENEMY.

I TRY TO VOLUNTEER MY HELP --

--BUT THE GIRL TAKES OFF WITHOUT ME.

LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY HIT A NERVE.

FUNNY, WATCHIN' HER I REALIZE SOMETHIN'.

*FOR A **WARRIOR,** BRATH SEEMED TO SPECIALIZE IN **THINKING.** FOR A PACIFIST, SEPHIE'S A BETTER **FIGHTER** THAN SHE KNOWS!*

LOOK AT HER!

I'M FEELIN' KINDA PROUD.

SHE'S STILL SKITTISH.

YOU CAN SEE THE HESITATION IN HER MOVEMENTS...

...LIKE SHE'S MAKING UP HER MIND.

YEP.

PROUD.

JUST WHEN I'M PATTING MY OWN EGO --

--SHE BLOWS THE OP.

OH, NO!

BACKS DOWN.

LOSES HER NERVE.

I'M SO SORRY! I--

IT'S HOPELESS.

ALL THAT POWER--

--AN' SHE FIGHTS LIKE A GIRL.

I DIDN'T MEAN--!

I'VE *GOT* YOU!

<STRANGER!>

<YOU HAVE POWER! HELP HER!>

GOT NO IDEA WHAT THE CURVE'S GOIN' ON ABOUT, BUT I RECOGNIZE A BITCHING OUT WHEN I'M GETTING ONE.

SO I DO THE HERO BIT.

WHICH IS STARTING TO COME PRETTY NATURALLY.

I COULD BE **SOME** KIND OF SAVIOR ON A LITTLE NO-TECH WORLD LIKE THIS...

...DOESN'T MATTER...

...I WANNA GO HOME.

BUT I GOT NO CLUE HOW TA GET THERE.

HURTS T'EVEN THINK ABOUT BEIN' STUCK HERE.

BUT I GOT ZAPPED OFFA BRATH'S WORLD...

THERE'S A WAY T'LEAVE THIS ONE.

THERE'S GOTTA BE.

SOME MAGIC WORD, SOME SPECIAL GESTURE.

I'LL FIND IT.

THERE'S NO WAY I'M NOT GETTIN' BACK TO ZANNI...

...WHO'S PROBABLY DREAMING OF ME RIGHT NOW.

DELASSIA

ZANNIATI?

WAKE UP--

I **TOLD** THEM TO SAVE YOUR DEATH FOR ME!

I'D BE SO VERY DISAPPOINTED IF I COULDN'T **FEED PIECES OF YOU TO THE SAURIANS!**

GRAWWRRR

KOOMP

UNH...

TROUBLE?

NNNH... STOP.

AH!

I'M DELIGHTED TO SEE YOU RISE, DEAR--

I LOVE AN OBEDIENT WIFE!

EX-WIFE.

WHERE'S ERIQ?

OH!

UNFORTUNATE.

YOUR CO-CONSPIRATOR IS DEAD AND YOUR HERO PROTECTOR--SAMANDAHL REY--ISN'T THERE TO SAVE YOU.

IT WOULD APPEAR **YOU** HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!

AS I RECALL, YOU'RE **VERY** GOOD AT THAT.

KREESH

SHUT UP, RONOLO.

THE **REAL** YOU COMES NEXT.

THIS KID'S NUTS.

SHE SHOWED SHE'S GOT THE STUFF, THEN SPENT **HOURS** PATCHIN' UP THE OTHER SIDE.

I DON'T GET YOU-- WHAT'RE YOU CLEANIN' 'EM UP FOR?

THEY'RE THE ENEMY, RIGHT?

LEAVE ***'EM!***

THIS ***ILAHN*** WANTS 'EM FIGHTIN', ***HE*** CAN COME KISS THEIR BOO-BOOS AND MAKE 'EM BETTER.

AFTER WHAT YOU SAID HE DID TO ***YOUR*** ISLAND, YOU SHOULDN'T BE NICE TO 'EM, YOU SHOULD ***HATE*** THEM!

ME, I STAYED OUT OF THE CLEANUP. NOT **MY** MESS.

MY ONLY JOB'S FINDING A WAY BACK HOME.

SAMANDAHL REY!

DON'T YOU TELL ME WHAT TO FEEL!

KID'S GOT SOME TEETH TO HER AFTER ALL.

SHE **CAN** DO MORE THAN FLY AND GLOW THINGS UP.

GUESS SHE JUST LIKES THE PRETTY POWERS BEST.

ILAHN MADE TORBEL FALL!

THESE MEN DO WHAT THEY'RE HIRED TO DO-- ***ILAHN*** WRITES THEIR CONTRACTS!

KID'S SQUAWKING LIKE A PSEUDOSAUR WITH A HOT KILL-PAC.

I SETTLE BACK T'ENJOY THE SHOW.

THEY'RE *JUST* TRYING TO MAKE THEIR WAY IN THE SKY! THEY DON'T *UNDERSTAND* WHAT ILAHN'S *TRULY* UP TO --

CAN'T YOU *SEE* HOW MANY HAVE JOINED US? ONCE THEY *REALIZE!*

HOW *DARE* YOU JUDGE ME --

-- OR *THEM!*

OH, THIS IS RICH.

YOU AREN'T EVEN *FROM* MY WORLD!

HOW DARE YOU --

HOW DARE YOU!

OH...!

YOU GO ON.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU NEED A SAFE EAR T'DROP SOME HARSH WORDS INSIDE OF...

YOU'RE --

YOU RE FROM ANOTHER WORLD...

...THERE ARE OTHER WORLDS...

...WITH OTHER PEOPLE...

IT'S JUST HITTIN' HER NOW.

IF THE IDEA OF ANOTHER WORLD MAKES HER HEAD SPIN LIKE THAT...

...JUST THINK IF SHE SAW A SAURIAN **DINNER.**

DON'T GET MAD MUCH, DO YOU?

YOU'RE NOT VERY GOOD AT IT.

MY PAL ROIYA COULDA RIPPED BOTH'A MY EARS CLEAN OFF BY NOW.

GO AHEAD -- YOU'RE TIRED AND UPSET -- LET IT ALL OUT.

I...I HAVE WORK TO DO.

⇒KAF⇐

BETTER GET THOSE BANDAGES MOVIN', ALTHOUGH IT LOOKS TOO LATE FOR THAT PAIR.

NOT *THIS* ONE--

CAN'T YOU FEEL IT?

HE'S NOT *GONE* YET.

IT'S WAR. YOU GOTTA LIVE WITH SOME LOSSES.

NO!

I CAN HEAL AS MANY AS I HAVE TO!

HEAL.

H-*HEAL?*

WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' TO 'EM, SEPHIE?

JUST FIXING THEIR WOUNDS.

HOW?!

HOW D'YOU DO THAT?

I JUST TOUCH WHERE IT'S...GONE WRONG ON THE INSIDE AND...***PUSH*** IT UNTIL IT'S WORKING AGAIN.

IT'S TOO LATE IF THE SPIRIT INSIDE HAS ALREADY ESCAPED TO JOIN THE STARS, BUT AS ***YOU*** CAN PROBABLY FEEL, ***HIS*** WAS STILL THERE.

NO, I *CAN'T* FEEL--

IF THE SPIRIT'S STILL--

ROIYA!

OH, GOD.

THE KEY TO.... FIXING ROIYA'S BEEN ON MY CHEST THIS WHOLE TIME.

SAM, DID I UPSET YOU?

I -- I JUST ASSUMED YOU ***KNEW*** THERE'S A ***SPIRIT*** INSIDE OUR BODIES...

NAH, IT'S NOT YOU.

IT'S -- I GOTTA GET HOME. YOU SEE, I'VE GOT A FRIEND WHO NEEDS T'BE... FIXED, LIKE YOU SAY.

I HAVE TO GO BACK.

I HAVE TO SEE IF --

I GOTTA FIND THE WAY.

I GOTTA DO THIS FOR HER.

Y'UNDER-STAND?

I GOTTA GO HOME.

HOME.

THAT'S IT, SEPHIE. ***HOME.*** REMEMBER THAT...

FOUND IT.

*LIKE REACHING FOR YOUR BOOTS. YOU JUST HAVE TO **PULL**--*

*FELT BAD ABOUT LEAVIN' THE KID IN THE MIDDLE OF A WAR, BUT I'D **LEFT** IN THE MIDDLE OF ONE.*

*ONE THAT NEEDS **FINISHING.***

YOU ***FIND*** THAT ILAHN AND KICK HIM ONE FOR ME, YOU ***GOT*** IT?

I'LL... DO THAT.

GOOD JOURNEY, SAMANDAHL REY...

...SAM.

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Sephie of Meridian

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PLEASE REVEAL SOMETHING I'M **NOT** AWARE OF.

DAMN.

IMAGE SHADOWING DEVICE ENGAGED.

MASKING HEAT, MOTION AND VISUAL SIGNATURES.

YOU?

AND WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING, ZANNI?

AREN'T WE A BIT OUT OF OUR BROADCAST RANGE, ROIYA?

MY SIGNAL'S STRETCHED THIN BUT A SUB-ETHER SCAN TURNED YOU UP QUICKLY ENOUGH.

SORRY TO PUT YOU TO SUCH TROUBLE.

NOT AS MUCH TROUBLE AS YOU'RE GOING TO BE IN, PRINCESS.

AND I'M BREAKING THIS LINK NOW.

YOU CAN'T--

ZIKKK

AN *ANOMALY* IN SECTOR T-99-5.

ANOMALY?

TWO AUTOMATED GUNS IN THAT SECTOR REACTED TO MOTION AND SEISMIC SENSORS.

BUT AFTER INITIAL ACTIVATION *FAILED* TO ACQUIRE A TARGET.

A TWITCH IN THE SYSTEM.

NOTHING TO BE *CONCERNED* ABOUT, SULTAN RONOLO.

THE GUNS POSSIBLY REACTED TO TECTONIC SHIFTS CAUSED BY THE CRASH OF THAT UNMANNED *DRONE* WE FIRED UPON.

YES. *NOTHING* TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT, I'M SURE.

YOU *DID* SAY THE DRONE WAS UNMANNED?

SECURITY IS VERY TIGHT ON GAIA, MINISTER FaLANGE.

THERE HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTS ON THE PRESIDENT'S LIFE FROM ***SEVERAL*** QUARTERS.

IN TRUTH, HE HAS BEEN ***REFUSING*** AUDIENCES WITH THE HIGHEST RANKING OFFICIALS.

BUT FAILING TO GREET THESE ***BRAVE*** HEROES YOU RESCUED FROM SAURIAN CAPTIVITY WOULD NOT BE...***POLITIC,*** ROIYA SINTOR.

IS SAMANDAHL REY NOT WITH YOU?

Um... HE'LL BE ALONG SHORTLY. THERE WAS SOME URGENT WORK TO BE DONE ABOARD THE *BITTERLUCK.*

EXCELLENT. THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN ANXIOUS TO SEE HIM. HE WAS GREATLY IMPRESSED BY THEIR ***LAST*** MEETING.

AND HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO MAKE SAM APPEAR WHEN YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE HE IS?

SHUT ***UP,*** JeMERIK.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE SAM IS?

YOU KEEP SAYING "YOU" INSTEAD OF "WE".

DO *YOU* KNOW WHERE HE IS?

I'D RATHER *NOT.*

YOU'D *RATHER* NOT, eh?

HOW'D YOU LIKE A SWIFT KICK IN THE—

FROM A HOLOGRAM? *NOW* I'M AFRAID.

ah hm.

PRESIDENT GANDAMAC IS READY TO SEE US.

CAN I AT LEAST ASK ABOUT *ZANNI?*

SHE'S JAMMING MY *SIGNAL*. NO CONTACT.

WHERE *IS* SHE?

FROM WHAT I CAN GATHER, JeMERIK...

"...SHE'S ONE STEP INTO *HELL*."

THIS IS STUPID. I SEE NO INTRUDER.

YOU WOULD COUNTERMAND GENERAL HRAD'S ORDER?

SCANNERS SHOW NOTHING. A POINTLESS ERRAND.

USE YOUR EYES. SCANNERS ARE ONLY MACHINES.

NOTHING TO SEE.

ONLY SOME DUST BLOWING BY ON THE WIND.

WIND?

ZANNI...

IT IS *ZANNI!* I *KNOW* THIS, GENERAL HRAD!

YOU SOUND *CERTAIN,* SULTAN RONOLO. WHO *IS* THIS ZANNI?

I'M *BLOODY* CERTAIN! A MAN KNOWS HIS *WIFE* WHEN HE SEES HER!

SHE'S OUT TO *KILL* ME!

WIFE?

IS *THAT* WHO YOU FEAR, SULTAN? YOUR *WOMAN?*

YOU'D NOT SAY THAT WERE THE *MATRIARCH* HERE, HRAD!

THERE'S A WOMAN YOU *ALL* FEARED.

THAT WAS TRUE AT *ONE* TIME, HUMAN. BUT NO *MORE.*

"THE *MATRIARCH'S* DAY HAS PASSED."

MOTHER?

I BRING YOU *FOOD.*

A *VELLOCH,* TCHLUSARUD?

THERE WAS A TIME I WOULD NOT *TOUCH* A MEAL UNLESS SERVED BY THE SISTERHOOD OF TCHRUKAR.

YOU MUST BE STRONG WHEN WE REACH THE IMPERIAL CITADEL, MOTHER.

IT IS *FORTUITOUS* THAT I FOUND YOU HERE BENEATH THE OLD TEMPLE.

TOGETHER WE WILL BE VICTORIOUS.

AND YOU WILL DINE *AGAIN* ON DELICACIES SERVED ONLY ON THE FINEST PLATES OF CYRADIAN PEARL.

WHEN WE HAVE KILLED *KHYRADON* AND RETURNED YOU TO THE THRONE.

YOUR LOYALTY *WARMS* ME, SON.

SO MUCH HAVE YOU *SACRIFICED* FOR THE CLAN AND ME.

THE DAY IS *DARK* FOR THE HEGEMONY.

KHYRADON *TILTS* THE BALANCE OF THE THREE GODS BY WORSHIPPING *KHYALHTUA* ALONE.

THE GODDESS OF *ANNIHILATION.*

"HE WHO SERVES DEATH BRINGS ONLY DEATH", SO IT IS SCRIBED.

KHYRADON'S BELIEFS RUSH US TO A MORE ***AGGRESSIVE*** CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE HUMANS.

TOO SOON. TOO SOON.

YOU WILL ***CHANGE*** THAT TODAY, MY SON.

OF ALL MY BROOD IT IS ***YOU*** WHO ARE FATED TO SERVE THE HEGEMONY.

IT IS YOU WHO WILL USE A ***SINGLE*** DEATH TO UNITE OUR WORLD.

"THEN AND ONLY THEN WILL THE DESTRUCTION OF THE HUMAN RACE BEGIN IN ***EARNEST.***"

MISTER PRESIDENT...THE CREW OF THE *BITTERLUCK* AND THE MEN OF THE NINTH PLANETARY MARINES.

WELCOME. ***WELCOME.***

I ***APOLOGIZE*** FOR THE STRINGENT SECURITY PRECAUTIONS.

UNDERSTOOD, SIR. WE'RE AT ***WAR.***

AS YOU *SAY*. I WANT TO *THANK* YOU ON BEHALF OF THE UNION *AND* ITS CITIZENS FOR BRINGING OUR *BRAVE* MEN OUT OF SAURIAN CAPTIVITY.

Um... YES.

WE DO OUR *BEST*, SIR.

AND *YOU* ARE...?

GUNNERY OFFICER JONS MITH, MISTER PRESIDENT.

AND DID YOU GIVE THOSE LIZARDS **HELL**, SON?

WE *MIGHT* HAVE, SIR. WITH MORE *SUPPORT* FROM YOU AND THE UNION PARLIAMENT.

INSTEAD I LOST **HALF** MY UNIT.

uh... WELL... uh...

DAMN.

hrum

AND WHERE'S THIS ***SAMANDAHL REY*** I'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT?

WHY, HERE HE IS ***NOW,*** MISTER PRESIDENT.

Huh?

MISTER PRESIDENT, I *APOLOGIZE* FOR BEING LATE. WE HAD A SEVERE LEAK IN MY SHIP'S ION CONTAINMENT UNIT.

QUITE ALL RIGHT. I WAS ONLY AFRAID I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SHOW MY *GRATITUDE*.

YOUR SERVICE TO THE UNION HAS BEEN *EXEMPLARY*.

SO, HE *WAS* ON BOARD. I THOUGHT YOU GUYS WERE *YANKIN'* ME.

I... IT APPEARS SO.

WHEN DID HE RETURN...

...ROIYA?

CLEVER GIRL.

IT WAS REALLY ***NOTHING*** AT ALL, MISTER PRESIDENT.

STILL, I WISH TO...

SOMETHING I FEEL ***ANY*** CITIZEN MIGHT HAVE DONE IN THE SAME SITUATION.

REALLY...

IT WAS A JOB THAT HAD TO BE DONE AND MY CREW AND I WERE MERELY IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.

THIS GUY'S GOING THROUGH THE ***ROOF*** ON THE NANO-POLLS.

WHO'S GONNA TELL THE ***PRESIDENT?***

AND WHILE I THINK THAT—

OUTSTANDING, COMMANDER REY. ***OUTSTANDING.***

AND LET US NOT FORGET THAT THIS VICTORY ***SNATCHED*** FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT...

...IS BUT ***ONE*** BATTLE IN THIS WAR WE FIND OURSELVES IN...

...AGAINST AN IMPLACABLE ENEMY WHO WILL STOP AT ***NOTHING*** TO SEE US EXTERMINATED OR ENSLAVED.

SHAK

SHAK

CHOOM
CHOOM
CHOOM

SAMANDAHL REY *VANISHES!*

WE HAVE SLAIN THEIR *PATRIARCH*. IT IS *ENOUGH*.

THERE ARE *TRAITORS* AMONG US?

NOT TRAITORS, JeMERIK. *INVADERS.* DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE THOSE UGLY *ACCENTS?*

"SAURIAN ASSASSINS!"

THERE ARE TOO MANY EVEN FOR *US,* SISTER.

SPEAK FOR *YOUR-SELF!*

PUT DOWN THE *ORDNANCE,* LADIES.

WE HAVE ABOUT A *MILLION* GOOD REASONS FOR DUSTING YOU RIGHT HERE.

THIS DOESN'T *HAVE* TO END BLOODY FOR YOU.

Oh, I FEAR THAT IT WILL END BLOODY FOR *ALL* OF US.

IN JUST A *FEW* MORE TICKS.

TeeeeeH TeH TeH TeH

TARGET ACQUIRED.

OPTIMAL RANGE APPROACHING...

"...NOW!"

SHE'S *TRICKED* YOU! THE TREACHEROUS WITCH FOUND *ANOTHER* WAY IN HERE!

SHE LED YOUR IDIOT TROOPS ON A *CHASE!*

TRAPS WORK *BOTH* WAYS, SULTAN RONOLO.

"YOUR MATE CAN TEACH ME *NOTHING* OF TREACHERY."

"I DID *NOT* REACH THIS RANK WITHOUT GAMESMANSHIP."

KRANNG

"I KNOW HOW TO BAIT AND *SET* A TRAP, SULTAN RONOLO.

SWSSSH

KRNNNG

KLNK

FSSSssssst

IS SHE *DEAD,* HRAD?

SHE LIVES. THE TOXIN IS A TEMPORARY PARALYTIC.

YOUR VOICE BETRAYS *CONCERN,* SULTAN.

ONLY THAT SHE MIGHT DIE *PAINLESSLY.*

THAT I MIGHT *MISS* THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE HER LAST DAYS OF LIFE... *INTERESTING.*

"TO OFFER HER A CHANCE TO *REPENT* FOR HER ACTIONS."

YOU ARE *CERTAIN,* MOTHER? THIS SHAFT LEADS TO KHYRADON'S *SANCTUM?*

TRUST IN MY KNOWLEDGE, MY SON.

THE SMELL OF BURNING AZAZZA ROOT.

IT IS THE TEMPLE.

MOTHER! WE ARE *DISCOVERED!* GET *BACK!*

AARRR!

IT IS *DONE.*

A PROMISE KEPT IS A PROMISE *REWARDED,* MATRIARCH.

I SHALL HOLD YOU TO THAT, KHYRADON.

YOU *SHALL* BE RESTORED TO YOUR FORMER SEAT, MY LADY.

SO LONG AS IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT *I* MAINTAIN THE TRUE POWER.

SON, I SPOKE TO YOU OF *SACRIFICE.*

IT IS TIME YOU MADE THE *ULTIMATE* SACRIFICE TO PRESERVE THE MONARCHY.

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I'M BACK!

SAM!
DON'T JUST *STAND* THERE! *DO* SOMETHING!
Huh?
ROIYA?
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S GOING *ON!*

BOMB!

FOUR-- NO *THREE* SECONDS!

WH--WHAT IS THIS?

IT IS SAMANDAHL REY! HE USES HIS MIND MAGIC!

EVERYONE STAND CLEAR. THIS COULD GET -- MESSY.

ROIYA...

I'M ALL RIGHT HERE, SAM.

YEAH, GUESS SO.

SISTER...

ONE SECOND...

FWAMP

YOU HAVE CRIPPLED HER.

SSSSSSS

KILL US NOW AND END OUR SHARED DISHONOR.

SUMMARY EXECUTION MAY BE ALL RIGHT ON TCHARUN...

...BUT THAT'S *NOT* THE WAY THINGS WORK AROUND HERE, LADY.

I WAS TOO LATE... AGAIN.

TOO LATE FOR THE PRESIDENT, BUT YOU SAVED THE *REST.*

I DIDN'T SAVE *YOU,* ROIYA.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I'M *INDESTRUCTIBLE* IN THIS FORM, SAM.

BEFORE, ON *TANIPAL.* I COULD HAVE STOPPED WHAT HAPPENED.

I DIDN'T *KNOW.*

DIDN'T KNOW *WHAT?*

THESE... *ABILITIES* I HAVE. THEY'RE *GREATER* THAN I KNEW.

IF I'D KNOWN THEN, ROIYA. I LET YOU DOWN. BUT IT'S TOO *LATE* NOW.

I DON'T *GET* IT, SAM... WHERE HAVE YOU *BEEN?*

LET HIM *GO,* ROIYA. HE'S GOT A *LOT* TO THINK ABOUT.

HE'S BEEN GIVEN A *GLIMPSE* OF A BIGGER UNIVERSE.

AND, OF COURSE, *YOU* KNOW ALL ABOUT IT, JeMERIK.

NOTHING I CAN *SAY* RIGHT NOW.

SAM WON'T TALK. *YOU* WON'T TALK.

AND I HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO

ROIYA...

"...YOU HAVE SO MUCH TO LEARN."

LOVELY ZANNI...

...HOW I WISH WE COULD HAVE GOTTEN ALONG BETTER.

RONOLO?

I HAD TO LEAVE IN A BIT OF A **RUSH**, ZANNI. NO **TIME** FOR SWEET FAREWELLS.

WHERE **IS** EVERYONE, RONOLO?

GENERAL HRAD WANTED TO **TORTURE** YOU. **DESPITE** THE RANCOR BETWEEN US, I COULD NOT BEAR THAT.

YOUR DEATH WILL BE A **QUICK** ONE, MY DEAREST.

I OWE YOU **THAT** MUCH.

I OWE YOU NOTHING!

WHERE DID YOU GO?

WHY LEAVE ME HERE ALONE?

NOT ENTIRELY ALONE, MY DEAR.

I AM HERE FOR YOU.

IT WAS A MISTAKE TO LEAVE ME ALIVE, RONOLO.

YOU WILL SOON SEE THE IRONY OF THAT.

YOU SEE, THIS ASTEROID IS A WEAPON.

WHAT HAVE YOU **DONE,** RONOLO?

PRIMITIVE. SIMPLE. EFFECTIVE.

A LARGER VERSION OF THE FIRST WEAPON EVER UTILIZED BY A SENTIENT RACE.

A ROCK.

EQUIPPED WITH AN ARC DRIVE TO CREATE A CONVENIENT WORMHOLE...

...SO WE CAN **THROW** IT AT THE HEART OF THE PLANETARY UNION.

BETRAYER! LIAR!

I WILL HAVE YOUR BEATING *HEART!*

I HAVE *NEVER* LIKED YOU, KHYRADON. NEVER *TRUSTED* YOU.

BUT I HAVE NEVER THOUGHT YOU A *FOOL*. ONLY A *FOOL* WOULD DEFY MY WISHES NOW.

WHO SPEAKS OF *BETRAYAL*, MATRIARCH? YOU DELIVERED YOUR OWN *SON* INTO MY HANDS.

I SACRIFICED HIM FOR THE GOOD OF *ALL*. FOR THE ROYAL HOUSE.

BUT I WILL NOT SEE HIM *KILLED*. THAT WAS NOT PART OF OUR BARGAIN.

I SUFFER YOUR EXISTENCE WITH *GREAT* DIFFICULTY, MATRIARCH.

I WILL ALLOW YOUR HOUSE A *SYMBOLIC* PLACE IN MY RULE.

BUT TCHLUSARUD MUST DIE.

BANISH HIM. *IMPRISON* HIM. PLACE HIM IN *STASIS*.

BUT KILL HIM AND YOU WILL NEED TO BURY *ME* ALONGSIDE HIM.

THE WITCH! SHE DICTATES *TERMS* TO ME?

WE *NEED* HER, LORD OF PROPHETS. WITH *HER* ALLIED TO OUR CAUSE WE CAN SANCTION YOUR RULE WITH LITTLE BLOODSHED.

POLITICS. I *DESPISE* THIS.

HAVE THIS *TOKEN* THEN.

HE MAY *LIVE*. BANISHMENT WILL BE HIS FATE.

THEN I AM *PLEASED*.

I *OWE* HIM AS MUCH FOR HIS LOYALTY.

"*MISGUIDED* THOUGH IT WAS."

BITTERLUCK, OLD GIRL.

YOU NEED SOME WORK.

SAM...?

I'D *LIKE* TO BE ALONE, ROIYA.

BUT YOU'VE BEEN *AWAY* SO LONG. I NEED TO *TALK* TO YOU.

I HAVE A LOT TO TELL *YOU*. THIS WORLD I VISITED...I LEARNED SO *MUCH*. I KNOW *MORE* ABOUT MY CAPABILITIES.

THAT'S *WONDERFUL*... RIGHT?

SOME OF IT. SOME OF IT *NOT* SO GREAT.

I DON'T *FOLLOW* YOU.

I HAD THE POWER TO *SAVE* YOU. THE *REAL* YOU. I COULD HAVE *KEPT* YOU FROM DYING.

YOU COULD BE *REAL* FLESH AND BLOOD NOT JUST AN... IMAGE.

BUT YOU *DIDN'T* KNOW, SAM.

THAT DOESN'T *HELP.*

THAT DOESN'T CHANGE HOW I *FEEL.*

WELL, GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF THAT *GRAVITY* WELL, BUDDY.

I HAVE SOME BAD NEWS OF MY *OWN.*

ZANNI'S *MISSING.*

WHY DID YOU WAIT TO *TELL* ME?

WHO RAN OFF TO TALK TO HIS *STARSHIP?*

WHERE *IS* SHE?

SHE WENT OFF TO KILL HER *HUBBY.*

LAST LOCK I HAD ON HER WAS AN *ASTEROID* IN THE BENARIS CLUSTER.

BUT SHE BROKE *CONTACT.*

ROIYA, WORK YOUR *MAGIC* AND GET A LINK TO HER.

JeMERIK *TOLD* YOU; ZANNI CUT US OFF.

I DON'T CARE IF SHE *WANTS* TO BE FOUND OR NOT.

"YOU ***KNOW*** THE KIND OF TROUBLE SHE CAN GET HERSELF INTO."

HIDING DOWN **HERE** WON'T SAVE YOU, DEAR ONE.

I'M ***NOT*** HIDING, YOU ARROGANT...

THERE MUST BE A WAY TO ***STOP*** THESE ENGINES.

ARE YOU AWARE THAT AMONG ALL MY WIVES YOU WERE ALWAYS MY ***FAVORITE?***

THERE ***MUST*** BE A WAY...

I SUPPOSE I SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU...

OUR RELATIONSHIP MIGHT NOT BE SO COLD NOW.

THAT WOULD BE TRUE IF YOU DIDN'T...

...DISGUST

ME!

oh.

IT MUST BRING YOU SATISFACTION TO BE *RID* OF SO UNPLEASANT A MATE, SULTAN.

VERY *TRUE*, GENERAL HRAD.

BUT I DID ONCE HAVE *GREAT* AFFECTION FOR HER.

WHICH IS THE REASON IT BRINGS ME SUCH SATISFACTION TO GIVE HER SO *GRAND* AN ENDING.

THE SUB-SPACE LINK TO ZANNI IS NO LONGER IN THE BENARIS CLUSTER.

HER POSITION HAS *MOVED.* I CAN'T FIX IT.

WHAT *QUADRANT,* ROIYA?

I CAN'T EVEN NARROW IT *THAT* MUCH, JeMERIK.

SINCE WHEN DID *YOU* TAKE SUCH AN INTEREST IN ASTRAL NAVIGATION?

I *HAVE* NO INTEREST REALLY. WHEN YOU'VE SEEN AS MUCH OF THE UNIVERSE AS *I* HAVE, IT ALL RUNS *TOGETHER* AFTER A WHILE.

EXCEPTING THE BRIGHT STAR THAT IS *YOU,* ROIYA.

JERK.

GO TELL SAM I THINK ZANNI'S IN SUB-SPACE TRANSIT.

I'LL HAVE A FINAL POSITION SOON.

HE'LL ONLY ASK QUESTIONS I CAN'T ANSWER. WHY DON'T YOU TELL HIM?

I CAN'T STAND THOSE SAD ***EYES*** OF HIS EVERY TIME HE LOOKS AT ME.

IT'S LIKE I'M JUST A CONSTANT REMINDER OF HIS FAILURE.

LIKE VISITING MY OWN ***FUNERAL*** OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

SAM?

MOVE ALONG! MOVE ALONG!

TAKE YOUR *LAST* LOOK AT THE WORLD.

YOU JOIN THE *DAMNED* AT KHOLYMA.

IF YOU LIVE TO *SEE* THE PLACE.

AND YOU *MAY* PRAY THAT YOU *DON'T.*

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!

FULL CAPACITY TO EACH CAR!

YOU...

YOU ARE *TCHLUSARUD,* ELDEST OF THE MATRIARCH.

I AM *NO* ONE.

MORE RIGHT THAN YOU *KNOW*...

...WE *ALL* BECOME GHOSTS AND FAINT MEMORIES AT KHOLYMA.

"ONLY AWAITING *DEATH* TO MAKE IT FINAL."

THRUST CONTROL PROGRAMS OPEN.

POWER STATUS.

FORWARD THRUST TO TEN PERCENT.

POSITIONING TRAJECTORY.

TARGET ACTUATED.

ALL POWER TO THRUSTERS TO ZERO.

THRUST ZERO.

COURSE UNCHANGED.

TARGET REMAINS ACTUATED.

WHAT *IS* THE TARGET?

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STAR A-8898878-7788778.

PLANETARY BODY: K-8787674163563-8

BUT THAT'S...

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IMPACT ALERT!
IMPACT ALERT!

WHAT *IS* THAT?

SWEET GAIA...

GAIASTARMILPAC TRANSMISSION 000997886754XG --

MEGA-URGENT -- ALL UNITS TO STATIONS -- STRAY CELESTIAL OBJECT ON IMPACT COURSE TO GAIA SURFACE --

-- SPEED 0.005 SL -- 10K ACTUAL -- EIT 12.987m

-- MAX RESPONSE -- MAX RESPONSE --

...IT'S THE END.

GAIASTARMILPAC TRANSMISSION 000997886756XG --

--LOST CONTACT SAXIMAR HOLIDAY STATION --

-- CASUALTY ESTIMATE 105K--

GAIASTARMILPAC TRANSMISSION 000997886761XG --

-- CELESTIAL OBJECT IDENTIFIED -- ROGUE ASTEROID EMERGED FROM STARPOINT 1-00X-99-5643 --

-- IMPACT IMMINENT --

-- SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE ARMORICAN CONTINENT IN IMPACT ZONE --

GAIASTARMILPAC TRANSMISSION 000997886764XG --

-- ALL UNITS PLANETARY DEFENSE TO OFF-PLANET DEFENSE POSTURE FIVE --

-- WEAPONS ARMED -- MAX FORCE -- MAX SPEED -- MISSION PARAMETERS AND SITE PROFILE NEXT TRANSMISSION --

-- GODSPEED --

SAM!

JeMERIK!

WHAT *IS* IT, ROIYA?

AN *ASTEROID*-- A *BIG* ONE!

IT'S ON A PATH FOR OUR ATMOSPHERE AT TACH FOUR!

WHY DIDN'T RING-COMMAND CATCH THIS ONE?

THEY *COULDN'T,* SAM. IT CAME OUT OF A RIFT *INSIDE* THE QUADRANT.

THEN IT'S *NO* ACCIDENT. IT'S A *WEAPON.*

I FOUND IT WHEN I WAS SCANNING FOR *ZANNI.*

ZANNI?

SHE'S *ON* THAT ROCK, SAM.

"IT'S A ***SAURIAN*** INSTALLATION AND SHE'S ***ALONE*** ON IT."

I WON T...

I ***WON'T*** DIE THIS WAY.

I'LL ***LIVE,*** RONOLO...

...I WILL BE A ***WITNESS.***

AND I'LL LIVE TO SEE YOU ***SUFFER*** FOR THIS.

ANY IDEA OF A *PLAN,* SAM?

Oh, I'VE *GOT* A PLAN, JeMERIK.

WE GET US CLOSE TO THAT ROCK AND I HOP OUT AND POUND THE LIVING *HELL* OUT OF IT.

SIMPLE, DIRECT AND EFFECTIVE.

IF THAT'S MEANT TO BE SARCASM, JeMERIK...

...I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR IT.

IT'S MOMENTS LIKE THIS I ***QUESTION*** THE WISDOM OF ACCEPTING THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL SLOT.

BUT GANDAMAC IS DEAD AND ***I'M*** IN THE HOT SEAT. NOW, EVERYONE ***REPORT.***

IT'S NOT A RANDOM EVENT, MADAME PRESIDENT. EARLY SCANS SHOW AN ***INSTALLATION*** ON THE OBJECT'S SURFACE.

ANALYSIS GIVES A STRONG INDICATION IT'S OF SAURIAN CONSTRUCTION.

IT APPEARS TO BE AN ARC DRIVE ENGINE.

PRIMARY IS ***STOPPING*** THIS BEAST BEFORE IT HITS OUR ATMOSPHERE. ***THEN*** WE THINK ABOUT REVENGE.

ADMIRAL UMPALA, ARE YOUR KIDS UP FOR THIS MISSION?

ALREADY SPACEBORNE AND PACKING ***HEAT,*** MADAME PRESIDENT.

"THEY'LL DO US ALL *PROUD.*"

PROFILES OF THIS BODY ARE ON YOUR AIMING SCANNERS.

THE MATH IS DONE. NOW LET'S DELIVER THE **PUNCH.**

HAMMER STRIKE ONE, **LINE** UP FOR INITIAL RUN.

LOOK AT IT. THAT'S A LIZARD CONSTRUCT IF **I'VE** EVER SEEN ONE.

ONLY MISSION-POINT TRANSMISSIONS, **SIX.**

YEAH, YEAH. JUST ***SHUT UP*** AND TAKE THE SHOTS.

MACHINE ACTIVITY IN SECTOR X-44-T.

RAD READINGS SHOW ***ORDNANCE*** HEATING UP.

FIRST RESPONSE. FLIGHT SUPPRESSION FIRE.

TAG 'EM FOR THE SNAKEHUNTERS AND MOVE ON.

AIMING POINT MINUS SIX.

WEAPONS ARMED.

AND AWAY!

ARMED

THIS ROCK IS LIZARD-FREE, RIGHT?

ALL I KNOW IS I'D HATE TO BE DOWN THERE WHEN THOSE PLANETBUSTERS GO TO WORK.

HEAVENLY MOTHER...

NOWHERE TO *RUN*.

THE ENTIRE *SURFACE* IS BREAKING UP.

STAY *AHEAD* OF THE SHOCKWAVE.

THINK, ZANNI, *THINK!*

ROIYA!

NO TIME FOR GREETINGS, ZANNI.

SAM'S ON HIS WAY. BUT HE'S GOT A BIGGER JOB THAN RESCUING LITTLE YOU.

*I'VE **CRUNCHED** THE PHYSICS AND YOU'VE GOT ONE OPTION.*

*DO WHAT I SAY AND YOU **MIGHT** MAKE IT.*

BRING YOUR NOSE UP AND PUNCH THE BURNERS.

WE'RE **LEAVING** HERE.

BECAUSE WHEN **SAM** GETS HIS BOOTS ON THE GROUND, THINGS ARE GOING TO GET ROUGH.

"HE'S THE MAN OF THE HOUR AND HE ***KNOWS*** IT.

CENTRAL TARGET IS THAT DEEP CREVICE DEAD CENTER BELOW YOU.

CAN'T **MISS** IT, ROIYA.

"LET'S JUST HOPE IT'S NOT GAIA'S ***LAST*** HOUR."

ANY STRATEGIES, SAM?

DROP INTO THE HOLE.

AND MAKE IT BIGGER.

I'LL SHOW YOU A FEW TRICKS I PICKED UP IN MY TRAVELS.

WATCH CLOSELY.

THIS IS GOING TO BE QUICK.

THAT'S SAM DOING THAT?

YOU GOTTA LOVE HIM, RIGHT?

YES... YES, I DO.

ENOUGH OF THAT KIND OF TALK, PRINCESS. CONCENTRATE ON GETTING CLEAR OF THE IMPACT ZONE.

SAM'S LITTLE TRICK WAS EFFECTIVE BUT MESSY.

"HE'S *REDUCED* THE GREATER DAMAGE THAT ROCK WOULD HAVE DONE.

"BUT THE SURFACE IS *STILL* IN FOR A HIT."

NO!

GAIASTARMILPAC TRANSMISSION 0009978869O1XG--

--CENTRAL ZONE'S SOUTHERN ARMORICA IN IMPACT ZONE--

--ESTIMATE 500 PLUS ASTEROID SEGMENTS 107V OR LARGER--

--DAMAGE APPROXIMATION IN THE UPPER MEGA PLUS ULTRA RANGES--

--FIRST CASUALTY ESTIMATES 1.5 BILLION APPROX--

--SECONDARY CASUALTIES X2 --

--PLANET-WIDE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AT TERMINAL MINUS 5.5.

--ESTIMATE FOUR BILLION CASUALTIES WITHIN SIX MONTHS--

SAM? ARE YOU *HEARING* ME, SAM?

RADIATION BACKWASH HAS BOLLIXED ALL TRANSMISSIONS ACROSS THE SCALE, ROIYA.

BUT SAM *HAS* TO KNOW ZANNI IS SAFE...

"HE HAS TO KNOW AT *LEAST* THAT.

"IT'S *SOME*THING TO HOLD ON TO."

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I THOUGHT I *LOST* YOU, ZANNI.

I'M *HERE,* SAM.

WELL... *ALMOST* HERE.

HOW LONG ARE THEY KEEPING YOU IN *QUARANTINE?*

ONLY A FEW *DAYS.*

WHO *KNOWS* WHAT KIND OF BUGS I MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO ON THAT SAURIAN ASTEROID.

THE ASTEROID. I ALMOST *BLEW* IT, ZANNI.

BUT YOU *DIDN'T.* YOU *SAVED* GAIA. AND *ME.*

THE DEATH COUNT IS AT A BILLION FIVE.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN *FAR* MORE. *HUNDREDS* OF BILLIONS.

NOW, YOU'VE SPENT *ENOUGH* TIME WITH ME.

GET YOURSELF *PLANETSIDE.* GAIA *NEEDS* YOU.

THEY NEED A *HERO* MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.

"IT'S *IMPOSSIBLE* TO COMPREHEND.

"ENTIRE SECTORS BURNED *CLEAN* OF LIFE.

"*HUNDREDS* OF MAJOR STRIKES ALL OVER THE WESTERN QUADS.

"GETTING CLOSE TO TWO *BILLION* DEAD. FIVE BILLION INJURED. TEN *TIMES* THAT NUMBER WITHOUT HOMES.

"AND THE FIRES ARE *STILL* BURNING.

"AFTERSHOCKS BRING DOWN BUILDINGS THAT *SURVIVED* INITIAL IMPACT."

IT'S ALL SO...

...IMPOSSIBLE.

THE WOUNDED. THE DEAD. THE LOST.

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT WAR WOULD COME TO *GAIA?*

JeMERIK, ARE YOU *LISTENING?*

ROIYA.

I... I'M NOT SURE WHAT I'M *FEELING.* IT'S PAINFUL AND...

YOU'RE *CRYING.*

HAVEN'T YOU EVER CRIED *BEFORE,* JeMERIK?

YOU THERE.

THEN THESE ARE *TEARS.*

ME?

I NEED HELP AND *YOU'RE* NOT HURT.

ME?

WE'RE STRETCHED TO THE *MAXIMUM* HELPING THE WOUNDED AND CAN'T SPARE THE PERSONNEL FOR THIS.

FOR *WHAT?*

SOMETHING THAT REQUIRES A WOMAN'S TOUCH.

THESE CHILDREN ARE *SEPARATED* FROM THEIR FAMILIES.

JUST KEEP AN EYE ON THEM UNTIL WE CAN SORT THINGS OUT.

CHILDREN?

ME?

TEARS. *SEE?*

Um... YES.

THIS IS A CHALLENGE THAT **MUST** BE ANSWERED.

THE VERY **SURVIVAL** OF THE HUMAN RACE IS AT STAKE.

RETALIATION MUST BE SWIFT AND IT **MUST** BE HARD.

THE SAURIANS CAN BE SHOWN **NO** QUARTER. NO **MERCY**.

I ASK YOU ALL TO PUT YOUR **EVERY** EFFORT BEHIND THE BLOODY WORK THAT MUST BE DONE.

TOGETHER WE CAN, AND ***WILL***, INSURE THAT THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY NO LONGER POSES A THREAT TO MANKIND.

I ASK YOU TO PRAY WITH ME FOR ***COURAGE***, AND EVENTUALLY, ***PEACE***.

I THINK YOU WORDED THAT TOO ***HARSHLY***, MADAME PRESIDENT. YOU'LL SCARE THEM.

WE'RE FACING ***ANNIHILATION***, MINISTER TARAK.

THEY ***NEED*** TO BE SCARED.

"THEY NEED TO BE *VERY* SCARED."

ONLY ANOTHER DAY TO KHOLYMA...

...A PART OF TCHARUN *YOU'VE* NEVER SEEN, I WAGER.

SPOILED *SON* OF THE QUEEN WITCH.

I THINK YOU'LL MAKE A FINE *SLAVE* FOR ME.

YOU WILL *SERVE* ME IN KHOLYMA. SERVE OR *DIE*.

NO NEED TO *SULK*, WITCH SON.

THERE ARE *BENEFITS* TO SERVING ME, SUCH AS --

GISH

LOOK *THERE*. DO YOU *SEE*?

WHO CAN SEE THROUGH THIS FILTHY *WIND*?

THE TRACK!

YEEEEEEEEAAAAH!!

NNNNGH!

UNNH!

HELP ME!

FREE ME!

DO FOR YOURSELVES.

UH!

LIFE READINGS?

HUNDREDS. THEY'RE ***DEEP*** IN THE PILED WRECKAGE.

LOCATION?

SUB-LEVEL FIFTEEN. BUT ***STRESS*** FACTORS ARE OFF THE SCALE.

WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE THIS ***SLOW*** OR WE'RE GOING TO COLLAPSE THE ENTIRE LEVEL.

THEY DON'T ***HAVE*** THAT KIND OF TIME.

JUST ***TELL*** ME WHAT TO DO.

SAMANDAHL REY?

YOU HAVE PEOPLE ***TRAPPED*** DOWN THERE?

UNDER MILLIONS OF TONS OF STEEL. IT'S A CHAOTIC JUMBLE.

MOVE THE WRONG BEARING BEAM AND --

I CAN TAKE THE LOAD OFF.

KEEP FEEDING ME ***READINGS,*** OKAY?

MORE TO YOUR RIGHT.

WE NEED A ***PATH*** DOWN TO THEM.

NOT A ***PROBLEM.***

I *HEAR* THEM!

THERE'S A WAY DOWN OVER *HERE.*

WE NEED YOU PEOPLE TO MOVE ORDERLY BUT *FAST.*

EVERYONE OUT?

THAT'S THE *LAST.*

GOTTA *RUN* THEN.

THAT GUY'S LIKE SOME KIND OF... *GOD.*

YEAH...

AM I THE ONLY ONE *BOTHERED* BY THAT?

HI.

MY NAME IS *ROIYA*. I'M HERE TO *PLAY* WITH YOU.

WHAT'RE YOU *DOING?*

YOUR HAIR IS *PRETTY.*

Uh...

JUST A SECOND, KIDS.

JeMERIK?

YES?

THEY WANT TO *TOUCH* ME.

AND?

AND I'M A *HOLOGRAM,* REMEMBER?

THEY NEED ME TO *COMFORT* THEM.

HOW CAN I DO THAT IF I CAN'T *TOUCH* THEM?

YOU'RE CLEVER. YOU'LL FIGURE OUT A WAY TO *AMUSE* THEM.

AMUSE.

HEY-- WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE VIDEE CHARACTER?

MUZZY STAMPER!

BICKY BUG!

TING-TANG!

FOOBOOLAH!

ZEEBA-REEBA!

WELL... LOOK WHO'S COME TO *VISIT!*

HAHAHAHAHA!

SQUONK!

YAY!

LOVELY.

?

I AM *TCHLUSARUD.*

AND *YOU* ARE?

I AM *KCHASKCHA* OF THE V'KOON. WE ARE AT *WAR* WITH YOUR HOUSE.

IT IS THE *MATRIARCH,* YOUR OWN MOTHER, WHO FORCED US FROM OUR LANDS.

WE SEEK TO *OVERTHROW* HER.

AND THE RUNNING VERMIN KHYRADON.

I AM NO LONGER OF THE HOUSE M'RANAHNK. I AM BANISHED.

YOU PLEAD FOR YOUR *LIFE?*

NEVER.

I OFFER MY *HAND.*

"EVERY AVAILABLE SHIP HAS BEEN ARMED AND ASSEMBLED IN GAIA'S ORBIT.

"THE NECESSARY DEFENSE SCREEN WILL BE MAINTAINED.

"ALL OTHER CRAFT WILL BE USED IN THE ASSAULT ON THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD.

"THEY WILL LINK AT DELASSIA WITH OTHER OUT-SYSTEM PATROL FLEETS.

"OVER ONE THOUSAND SHIPS IN ALL.

"ALL GROUND FORCES HAVE BEEN ASSEMBLED INCLUDING PLANETARY MARINES AND STAR RANGERS.

"GROUND ARMOR UNITS AND DEMOLITION TEAMS ARE SPACEBOUND.

"SAMANDAHL REY WILL COMMAND THE ACTION FROM HIS OWN SHIP, THE BITTERLUCK."

IT'S *EVERYTHING* WE HAVE.

I ONLY HOPE IT'S *ENOUGH*.

MADAME PRESIDENT, YOU *PROMISED* ME A MOMENT.

PLEASE MAKE IT *QUICK*. I'VE LITTLE TIME AND *LESS* PATIENCE TO ABSORB SCIENTIFIC DATA.

THIS IS A GEOLOGIC *DAMAGE* ASSESSMENT, YES?

IT'S MORE *URGENT* THAN THAT.

THE *IMPACT* OF THE CELESTIAL OBJECTS IN THE WESTERN QUADRANTS HAS RIVEN FAULTS *THROUGH* GAIA'S MANTLE.

ONE OF THESE FAULTS HAS REACHED THE PLANET'S *CORE* AND DESTABILIZED THE ENTIRE TECTONIC STRUCTURE.

WE'RE LOOKING AT AN *IRREVERSIBLE*, PLANET-DESTROYING SCENARIO.

HOW MANY MONTHS DO WE *HAVE*?

NOT MONTHS, MADAME PRESIDENT.

DAYS.

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KILL HIM!

YESSSS! HE CANNOT LIVE!

KILL!

KILL HIM!

KILL HIM NOW!

I SHOULD *HEED* THEIR COUNSEL. YOU ARE TOO *DANGEROUS* TO LET LIVE, TCHLUSARUD.

AND WE COULD USE THE *MEAT*.

THE V'KOON ARE *CANNIBALS* NOW?

IT IS ONLY CANNIBALISM TO EAT YOUR *OWN* KIND. *YOU* ARE OF THE LOFTY ROYAL FAMILY.

THEN *KILL* ME AND LOSE ALL.

A *THREAT*?

A DESPERATE *PLOY* TO SAVE YOUR HIDE?

WE HAVE *COMMON* GOALS, KCHASKCHA.

I WISH THE DOWNFALL OF KHYRADON AS MUCH AS YOU.

WE ARE *BOTH* BETRAYED.

YOU WOULD TURN AGAINST YOUR OWN *MOTHER?* YOU WOULD *DESTROY* THE MATRIARCHY?

IT IS TIME FOR HER RULE TO *END* FOR THE GOOD OF THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

A *PATRIOT* NOW?

AND WHY WILL SPARING *YOUR* LIFE MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEFEAT AND VICTORY?

I *KNOW* KHYRADON. I KNOW HIS *FORTRESS*. HIS *STRENGTHS*. HIS *WEAKNESSES*.

WHO AMONG YOU IS *BETTER* SUITED?

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

"WE DO ***NOT*** MARCH SOUTH TO KHYRADON.

"THIS COLUMN MOVES TOO ***SLOW.*** WE WOULD BE CAUGHT IN THE OPEN ***LONG*** BEFORE WE REACHED HIS TEMPLE.

"WE NEED ***FASTER*** TRANSPORT AND ***MORE*** SOLDIERS."

THESE ARE THE TH'KAAL WASTES. WE'LL FIND ***NO*** REINFORCEMENTS HERE.

WE ***WILL,*** KCHASKCHA. TO THE ***NORTH.***

A GATHERING OF SAURIANS WHO ***BURN*** WITH HATRED FOR KHYRADON AND THE FOLLOWERS OF KHYALHTUA.

"KHOLYMA.

"WHERE THE ENEMIES OF THE HEGEMONY ARE SENT TO *DIE*.

"ALL WE MUST DO IS *FREE* THEM AND WE'LL HAVE OUR ARMY."

THEY ARE PREPARED TO PREVENT *ESCAPE*. THEY ARE NOT *EXPECTING* ASSAULT FROM OUTSIDE.

THEY RESPOND TO OUR APPROACH!

KOOM!

HRRAWWR

WE ARE *DISCOVERED!*

WE HAVE NO *ALTERNATIVE!* ATTACK *NOW!*

ATTACK NOW! THROW EVERYTHING INTO THEM!

THEIR COMMUNICATIONS *MUST* BE CUT!

KHOLYMA *MUST* BE ISOLATED!

WITHOUT REINFORCEMENTS THIS REVOLT DIES *HERE*.

WE HAVE *NO* CHOICE.

SUCCEED HERE OR BE **BURIED** *HERE!*

"THERE IS *NO* MIDDLE PATH!"

VENGEFUL KHYALHTUA.

MIGHTY KHYALHTUA.

WHY DO YOU NOT *ANSWER* MY PLEAS?

I *NEED* YOUR GUIDANCE.

DO NOT *ABANDON* ME.

DO NOT *DESERT* YOUR MOST FAITHFUL.

O HOLY KHYRADON?

YOU *DARE* DISTURB ME AT PRAYER?

THERE IS TROUBLE, MERCIFUL ONE. REPORTS FROM *KHOLYMA*.

TCHLUSARUD.

REPORT!

EMERGENCY TRANSMISSIONS FROM KHOLYMA.

⇒PSHHHK⇐ ...LAIDER ATTACK...

⇒SKAAAK⇐ ...KEN THROUGH OUTER WALL ⇒SKIK⇐ FALLING BACK TO MAIN DETENTION BLOCK --

⇒SHHHHK⇐ ...NOT HOLD ⇒SKAK⇐ DEFENSES FAILING --

SHHHHKKTIK

IT IS THE WHELP OF THAT TREACHEROUS WITCH!

I WANT HIM DEAD!

DEAD!

"I WILL SUFFER HIM NO LONGER!"

ASIDE!

FOLLOW ME INTO THE BREACH!

THE BLOODIEST WORK IS *DONE.*

THIS IS THE *LAST* OF THEM!

THEIR RESISTANCE IS *EXHAUSTED!*

BRING THE PLASMA CASTER *FORWARD!*

THE MAIN HOLDING CELLS ARE THROUGH *HERE!*

THE MOST DESPERATE AND *DANGEROUS* OF KHYRADON'S ENEMIES...

...AND *OUR* ALLIES!

FIRE!

KOOM

THE LAST OF THE GUARDS OFFER RESISTANCE.

WHAT *ORDERS*, TCHLUSARUD?

KILL!

IT IS OVER.

THE FIRST BATTLE IN A NEW WAR.

YOU ARE SO CERTAIN THESE CUTTHROATS WILL *JOIN* US?

WHAT *CHOICE* HAVE THEY, KCHASKCHA?

THEY WERE SENT HERE TO *DIE.*

"NOW A SECOND *CHANCE* IS OFFERED.

"A CHANCE FOR REDEMPTION AND *REVENGE.*"

PRISONERS OF KHOLYMA!

WE ARE YOUR LIBERATORS!

YOU ARE THE *FORGOTTEN.*

YOU ARE THE *DAMNED.*

THE HEGEMONY IS AT *WAR* WITH THE HUMANS.

OUR EMPIRE IS AT THE BRINK.

KHYRADON LEADS THE TRIBES TO *DISASTER.*

THEY *SHARE* HIS MADNESS. THEY *FOLLOW* HIM TO DESTRUCTION.

IT FALLS TO US TO *END* HIS REIGN.

I OFFER MY HAND AND MY *WORD.*

JOIN US AND MARCH ON THE TEMPLE OF THE *TRAITOR* WHO SENT YOU HERE.

WILL YOU MARCH WITH US?

TCHLUSARUD!

TCHLUSARUD!

TCHLUSARUD!

MATRIARCH!

WHAT *IS* ALL THIS NOISOME ACTIVITY, KHYRADON?

IT IS YOUR *SON!*

TCHLUSARUD?

THERE IS A *REVOLT* AT KHOLYMA.

THE PRISONERS JOIN WITH *REBELS* OPPOSED TO MY VISION.

WHAT *CONNECTION* IS THIS TO TCHLUSARUD?

HE IS *THERE.*

YOU *PERSUADED* ME TO LET HIM LIVE!

YOU *PROMISED* HE WOULD NO LONGER BE A THREAT!

I VOWED *NO* SUCH THING.

IT IS HIS *BLOOD,* KHYRADON; HIS HERITAGE.

SOMETHING YOU CAN NEVER *HOPE* TO OBTAIN.

BUT DO NOT BLAME *YOURSELF.*

YOU ARE *LOW* BORN.

A MATTER OF *BLOOD,* IS IT?

YOUR LINE ENDS WITH *YOU,* MATRIARCH.

AND SOON ALL VESTIGES OF THE HOUSE OF M'RANAHNK WILL BE ERASED...

"WHEN YOUR ***SON*** AND ALL WHO FOLLOW HIM GO TO THE GRAVE."

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GAIA IS DYING.

THE RECENT ASTEROID STRIKES TO THE SURFACE HAVE CAUSED THE PLANETARY STRUCTURE TO BECOME UNSTABLE.

GAIA'S CORE WILL SOON ERUPT ON A GLOBAL SCALE, BREAKING THE ENTIRE PLANET TO PIECES.

MEASURES ARE BEING TAKEN TO SAVE AS MANY LIVES AS POSSIBLE.

NO..

SAM!

YOU NEED TO *HEAR* THIS!

THIS IS OF THE UTMOST URGENCY. THE LIFE OF OUR HOMEWORLD IS PLAYING OUT IN HOURS.

ATTEMPTS TO STABILIZE METRO-CENTERS AGAINST THE COMING CATACLYSM ARE THEORETICAL AT BEST.

HUNDREDS OF **BILLIONS** OF LIVES ARE AT STAKE.

OUR TASK IS A NEAR-IMPOSSIBLE ONE.

I NEED YOUR COURAGE, YOUR PRAYERS...

...AND MOST OF ALL YOUR SPEED.

HURRY HOME.

THIS IS WHY I AM RECALLING THE BATTLEFLEET TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MASS EVACUATIONS.

ALL BUT THE BITTERLUCK WILL RETURN PLANETSIDE FOR FURTHER ORDERS.

THE FLEET ALREADY FORMING AT DELASSIA WILL HAVE TO TAKE ON THE INVASION OF TCHARUN AND THE SAURIAN HOME SYSTEM.

MADAME PRESIDENT! THIS IS SAMANDAHL REY! YOU'LL NEED ME TO--

I NEED YOU TO STAY THE COURSE TO DELASSIA, COMMANDER.

BUT GAIA--

--IS STILL IN DANGER OF FURTHER STRIKES FROM THE SAURIANS.

I NEED YOU TO **NEUTRALIZE** THOSE THREATS.

YOU'RE NOT MAKING--

THAT IS A DIRECT--

BREAK CONTACT!

SAM...

BREAK CONTACT!

SHE *ORDERED* YOU.

I DIDN'T *HEAR* IT, ZANNI!

DID *ANYONE* HEAR IT?

I *HAVE* TO GO. I'M NOT SURE I HAVE THE *POWER*.

HELL, I BARELY KNOW *ANYTHING* ABOUT MY POWERS.

BUT YOU HAVE TO *TRY*.

RIGHT. BUT IT MEANS LEAVING *YOU*, ZANNI.

WE'LL BE FINE.

SOMETHING ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE TEARING US *APART*.

LOOK, GO AND SAVE THE *WORLD* THEN CATCH UP WITH US ON TCHARUN.

OKAY?

I...

SEE YOU ON TCHARUN.

I'LL BE *WAITING*, SAM.

AND THERE HE *GOES.*

OFF TO FULFILL HIS FATE.

ANOTHER CRYPTIC REMARK, JeMERIK?

A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT, ROIYA. SAM HAS A TREMENDOUS TASK AHEAD OF HIM.

"I'M *JeMERIK.* I KNOW MORE THAN *YOU* DO!"

REALLY, ROIYA. THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH I CAN REVEAL.

DO YOU EVER GET TO THE *POINT,* PAL?

I MERELY SUGGEST POSSIBILITIES BASED ON KNOWLEDGE THAT HAS BEEN—

BLAH BLAH BLAH...

NEXT STOP: *DELASSIA.*

THERE'S THE COMBINED FLEET FROM THE PROVINCIAL WORLDS.

WONDER HOW *THEY'RE* GONNA FEEL. THEY WERE EXPECTIN' A FLEET --

-- AND ALL THEY'RE GETTIN' IS *THIS* BUCKET.

THIS *'BUCKET'* SAVED YOUR LIFE, LIEUTENANT MITH.

ADMIRAL RHONSO, GREETINGS FROM *THE BITTERLUCK.*

Uh?

SORRY TO BE SO ABRUPT, BUT THERE'S NO TIME FOR FORMALITIES.

WHERE'S ADMIRAL UMPALA?

THERE'S A DIRE HOMEWORLD EMERGENCY. THE MAIN FLEET IS REMAINING IN-SYSTEM.

YOU'RE TO COVER US WHILE WE MAKE PLANETFALL ON TCHARUN WITH A MARINE STRIKEFORCE.

WE'LL BE JOINED THERE BY COMMANDER REY.

FOR *WHAT* MISSION OBJECTIVE?

THE ***DESTRUCTION*** OF KHYRADON, THE ***LEADER*** OF THE SAURIAN RADICALS.

ONE MAN CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT?

TRUST ME, ADMIRAL. SAM ***DOESN'T*** DISAPPOINT.

WEAPONS ARMED AND GEAR STRAPPED TIGHT. WE'RE GOING TO DOWNTOWN LIZARDVILLE.

I'M GOING ***WITH*** YOU.

YOUR ***FUNERAL,*** LADY.

OFF-WORLD EVACUATIONS COMPLETED TO MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE WITHIN THE ESTIMATED TIMEFRAME.

POPULATION OF OUTLYING CON-METRO AREAS OF 2.2 MIL DENSITY MOVING WITHIN DEFENSE ZONES.

TECTONIC ACTIVITY TO 9.80007 ON **BERKMUND** SCALE.

EPICENTERS DEEP BENEATH CONTINENTAL MANTLE LAYERS.

GLOBAL SURFACE INTEGRITY FAILING.

THE CLOCK IS RUNNING OUT.

"NOW WOULD BE THE TIME FOR A **MIRACLE.**"

IS THIS WISE, ROIYA?

JeMERIK...

I MEAN, IS THIS THE BEST COURSE?

YOU HAVE A *BETTER* IDEA?

I WANT TO *HEAR* IT!

MAYBE I'M *STUPID,* BUT I CAN'T *THINK* OF ANOTHER WAY TO ARC-JUMP INTO A HOSTILE SYSTEM--

--CONTROLLED BY THE MOST *BELLIGERENT* AND *PARANOID* SENTIENTS IN THIS CORNER OF THE *UNIVERSE.*

TARGET BODY IN EFFECTIVE RANGE.

FLEET ARRAY SLAVED TO FLAGSHIP CONTROLS.

POWER TO FORWARD GUNS --

PRE-DESIGNATED ZONE ACQUIRED.

"--*ALL SHIPS* LOCKED ON TARGET WINDOW--

"--*FIRE!*"

ROIYA?

WHAT ARE THE ***VARIANCES*** HERE?

HOW ***CLOSE*** ARE WE TO FLYING INTO OUR OWN PHOTON STREAMS?

YOU KNOW THE THICKNESS OF ONE OF YOUR ***EYELASHES,*** ZANNI?

WELL, WE DON'T HAVE ***THAT*** MUCH ROOM FOR ERROR.

READYING SHIELDS.

INITIALIZE AT FULL SPECTRUM.

DIVERT ALL POWER TO SHIELD GENERATORS.

SHIELDS HOLDING STEADY.

IMPERMEABLE TO 99th PERCENTILES.

RADIATION PROTECTION AT OPTIMUM.

THIS **SHOULD** WORK.

IT **HAS** TO WORK.

AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE SOMEWHERE **ELSE?**

NOT WHILE THERE'S WORK ***HERE,*** DOCTOR KELK.

YOU'RE THE BRAIN WHO ***PREDICTED*** THIS.

NOW TELL ME HOW TO ***PREVENT*** IT.

YOU **CAN'T.**

HELP ME *OUT* HERE, DOC.

IT'S ALL *CHAOS*, COMMANDER.

THE PLANET IS BREAKING UP IN A RANDOM SERIES OF FRACTURES AND DISASTROUS GEOLOGIC EVENTS.

WHAT IF IT WERE *CONTROLLED?*

HOW?

I USED TO PLAY A *GAME* WHEN I WAS A KID.

YOU HAD TO GET A PATTERN OF BALLS INTO A SERIES OF *POCKETS.*

THE GAME WAS ALL IN HOW THE PATTERN *BROKE.*

"THEN EVERYTHING FALLS INTO PLACE."

WE'RE LOSING OUR ESCORTS!

AND WE'RE NOT EVEN THROUGH THE *FIRST* LINE OF SAURIAN DEFENSES!

ROIYA --

I *SEE* IT, JeMERIK!

THE WORST THING ABOUT THIS WHOLE DAMN MISSION...

--IS THAT GETTING TO THE SURFACE IS THE *EASY* PART!

ENTERING ATMOSPHERE!

SECURE FOR *LANDING!*

GROUND BATTERIES LOCKED ON.

BITTERLUCK TO FLEET COMMAND -- GIVE US SOME COVER FIRE --

-- ALL TAGGED POSITIONS.

APPROACHING AREA OF OPERATIONS.

THIS IS GOING TO BE HOT AND DIRTY.

READY, MARINES?

MITH HERE. WE'RE AMPED UP AND SPITTIN' MAD.

ROIYA! DID INTEL MENTION LOCAL CONDITIONS?

JUST DESERT CLIMATE AND A CHANCE OF LIZARDS.

THEY WOULDN'T HAVE MENTIONED ANYTHING ABOUT A *CIVIL WAR,* WOULD THEY?

WHOA! THIS ***WASN'T*** IN THE REPORTS, ZANNI.

BUT YOU COULDN'T *ASK* FOR A BIGGER DISTRACTION.

UNLESS WE HAVE TO FIGHT *BOTH* SIDES.

IS THAT MEANT TO BE *CRYPTIC,* JeMERIK?

OR ARE YOU JUST BEING A *POOP?*

MERELY *OBSERVANT,* DEAR ROIYA--

"-- ANY *POOP* THAT MIGHT BE INVOLVED STRUCK THE VENTILATORS LONG BEFORE *WE* GOT HERE...

DEATH!

DEATH TO *ALL* WHO FOLLOW KHYRADON!

NO!

NONESSENTIAL PERSONNEL

NO!

NO!

WHAT *DISTRESSES* YOU, RONOLO?

THE TARGETED ASTEROID *FAILED* TO DESTROY GAIA, HRAD.

BUT IT DID *DAMAGE,* DID IT NOT?

A BILLION DEAD. MAYBE *MORE.*

WE HAD *SOME* DEGREE OF SUCCESS.

THERE IS *WORSE* NEWS.

ZANNI *SURVIVED.*

SHE *LIVES?*

THEN THAT MEANS --

--SAMANDAHL REY *KNOWS* WHO IS RESPONSIBLE.

CHANGE COURSE!

GENERAL?

WE ARE NO *LONGER* RETURNING TO TCHARUN!

BUT OUR RETURN WAS A DIRECT COMMAND FROM KHYRADON.

I *COUNTERMAND* THAT ORDER! SET A COURSE FOR --

I WILL *NOT!* YOU DO NOT HAVE THE *AUTHORITY!*

WE WILL NOT ALL SUFFER FOR *YOUR* COWARDICE, GENERAL!

FOOLS!

WHAT ARE WE TO *DO*, HRAD?

WITHDRAW FORWARD!

MY *PERSONAL* GUARD WILL PROTECT US!

MY *IMMORTALS* WILL ESCORT US TO MY PERSONAL CRUISER.

WILL THEY REMAIN *LOYAL?*

THEY ARE OF MY TRIBE--OF MY *BLOOD.*

YOU WILL *HOLD* THIS POSITION TO THE LAST!

YES, GENERAL HRAD!

THIS WAY!

A *MUTINY?*

IT DAMN SURE *LOOKS* LIKE IT!

THE CRUISER IS FUELED AND EQUIPPED. SYSTEMS *BEYOND* THE SAURIAN FRONTIER ARE WITHIN ITS RANGE.

BUT THE DREADNAUGHT WILL *PURSUE.*

YOU ALLOW *FEAR* TO GUIDE YOU, RONOLO.

WE WILL BE *AWAY* FROM THIS MADNESS IN MOMENTS.

*GENERAL HRAD -- YOU **CANNOT** ESCAPE.*

*WE HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO **HOLD** YOU.*

IDIOTS.

YOUR CONTROL CONTACTS WITH THE DREADNAUGHT HAVE BEEN *TERMINATED.*

THE BAY DOORS WILL ***NOT*** OPEN AT YOUR COMMAND.

*YOU WILL **SURRENDER** TO THE CREW AND BE HELD FOR TRIAL WHEN WE REACH TCHARUN.*

*ESCAPE IS A VAIN HOPE FOR **ALL** OF YOU.*

SURRENDER **NOW** WHILE MERCY IS OFFERED.

AND THE TIME FOR THAT OFFER IS **LIMITED.**

MERCY...

...A ***HOLLOW*** PROMISE.

WHAT ARE YOU ***DOING?***

POWERING UP THRUSTERS TO MAXIMUM.

THE BAY DOORS ARE ***LOCKED!***

HRAD ***DOOMS*** HIMSELF!

IT IS ***SUICIDE!***

UNNH!

THE DREADNAUGHT...

DESTROYED, RONOLO. AND *WITH* IT, ANY EVIDENCE OF OUR ESCAPE.

THOUSANDS OF YOUR KIND DEAD.

FANATICS.

I WILL NOT OFFER *MY* HEAD TO KHYRADON.

BETTER TO FIND A TEMPERATE PLANET OR MINING COLONY BEYOND THE FRONTIER--

--AND HOPE WE ARE *FORGOTTEN*.

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"YOU *BELIEVE* IN HIM."

"YES, I DO."

"DO YOU *FEAR* FOR HIM?"

"YES."

"EVEN THOUGH SAM NOW HAS *GOD*-LIKE POWERS?"

"HE CAN *STILL* BE HURT."

"BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU FEAR *MOST*."

"DAMN YOU."

"YOU FEAR THAT SAM WILL *FAIL*."

"HE HAS FOUR HUNDRED *BILLION* LIVES IN HIS HANDS."

"*NO ONE* COULD SURVIVE WITH THAT ON THEIR CONSCIENCE.

"DO YOU THINK HE CAN SAVE *GAIA*?"

"WHY DO YOU ALWAYS ASK ME QUESTIONS YOU KNOW THE ANSWERS TO?"

"DO *YOU* THINK HE CAN SAVE GAIA?"

"HE *HAS* TO."

"IF IT'S *POSSIBLE* THEN HE'S THE *ONLY* ONE WHO CAN DO IT.

"HE COULD HAVE *PASSED* ON THIS."

"HE WAS *COMMANDED* AWAY FROM HERE BY THE PRESIDENT HERSELF."

"MAYBE YOU *DON'T* KNOW EVERYTHING, SMART GUY."

"YOU *SURE* DON'T KNOW SAMANDAHL REY."

TCHARUN: SAURIAN HOMEWORLD.

NOW, SHUT *UP*, JeMERIK.

I'VE GOT *WORK* TO DO.

I THOUGHT YOU PRIDED YOURSELF ON MULTI-TASKING, ROIYA.

WE'RE INVADING A *PLANET* HERE?

I NEED TO *CONCENTRATE*, JeMERIK.

RIDE'S *OVER!*

MOVE! *MOVE!* **OFF** THE TRANSPORT!

JONS, THIS PLANETFALL IS *WHITE*-HOT!

NOTHING SOME *SUPRESSION FIRE* CAN'T TAKE CARE OF!

ROIYA, DID YOU *HEAR* THAT?

I HEARD, ZANNI.

PULSE CANNONS *MAX* POWER.

THAT WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, ZAN'?

LOVELY.

CALL IF YOU NEED MORE MUSCLE.

NICE *WORK,* HOLO-GIRL.

BUT NOW WE GET OUR *HANDS* DIRTY.

GUH?

SMELLS LIKE COUNTRY-FRIED *LIZARD.*

MISSION OBJECTIVE ONE: FIND *KHYRADON.*

AND WHEN WE *FIND* HIM?

HOLD OUR GROUND AND HOPE SAM'S *FINISHED* ON GAIA.

OR *WHAT?*

OR KHYRADON *CRUSHES* US LIKE BUGS, JONS.

JUST SO I KNOW THE *OPTIONS,* LADY.

'SCUSE ME, BUT YOU'RE GIVIN' *ORDERS,* RIGHT?

YES.

WHAT'S YOUR *RANK?*

I'M THE DELASSIAN *AMBASSADOR.* AND I HAVE A STAKE HERE, TOO.

GHALEN, LOOK IN HERE.

WHAT'S *THIS* PLACE?

A *NURSERY.* LOOK AT ALL THE LIZARD *BABIES.*

WHERE'S THEIR *PARENTS?*

LIKE *I* KNOW?

WHAT'S OUR *ORDERS* ON THIS?

DUNNO.

THEY'D ALMOST LOOK *CUTE* IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW--

-- WHAT THEY GROW UP TO BE.

GHALEN!

SCREEEEE

BIG OR SMALL, THEY'RE STILL *LIZARDS.*

REMEMBER WHAT YOU *SAW* HERE, MARINES.

LOOKS LIKE THE *LOCALS* ARE DOING MOST OF THE WORK FOR US.

I WOULDN'T PUT *MUCH* STORE BY THAT.

Oh, I *FOLLOW* YOU, JeMERIK...

...THAT "*THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY IS MY FRIEND*" STUFF IS FOR *MORONS.*

THIS CROWD WOULD JUST AS SOON *EAT US* AS GREET US.

BRING UP A ***PULSE CANNON!***

UNTIL WE CAN BRING DOWN THE TEMPLE DOORS, THIS IS A ***FORLORN*** HOPE!

TCHLUSARUD! WE ***HAVE*** NO HEAVY GUNS LEFT!

THEN WE MUST FIND ***ANOTHER*** WAY IN, KCHASKCHA!

HOW? KHYRADON'S ZEALOTS ARE ***SLAUGHTERING*** MY WARRIORS!

A ***SHIP.***

ALL ***THREE*** GODS ABANDON US.

OUR AIRSHIPS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED.

"PERHAPS ***NOT,*** KCHASKCHA—"

--FORTUNE WORKS ON A PATH *UNKNOWN* TO US.

LOSER?

"WHICH SIDE IS *HE* ON?"

WHERE THERE WAS **ONE** NOW THERE ARE **SIX.**

BUT **ALL** ARE GAIA.

THERE'S BEEN LOSS OF LIFE BUT IT'S **MINIMAL** CONSIDERING--

--WE'VE SEEN THE **END OF THE WORLD.**

OR AS NEAR AS I HOPE TO EVER SEE.

YOU **SAVED** GAIA, SAM.

I COULD HAVE DONE **MORE,** MADAME PRESIDENT.

NO ONE COULD HAVE DONE MORE.

NOW THE UNION NEEDS **ONE** MORE SERVICE FROM YOU.

GO TO TCHARUN AND **END** THE REIGN OF THE MONSTER KHYRADON.

BEFORE HE CAN STRIKE AT

WHAT WOULD WE HAVE DONE WITHOUT HIM?

WHAT WILL WE DO *WITH* HIM, MADAME PRESIDENT?

I DON'T HAVE THE *PATIENCE* FOR INNUENDO, MINISTER RANDEZEL.

THEN I SHALL SPEAK *PLAINLY.*

WE HAVE PLACED OUR FATE INTO THE HANDS OF A MAN WHO HAS BECOME A *DIETY.*

GAIA OWES HIM *EVERY-THING.*

WHERE DOES HIS POWER *COME* FROM? DO WE KNOW ITS *SOURCE?*

DO WE KNOW ANYTHING *ABOUT* SAMANDAHL REY?

WE KNOW WHAT WE *NEED* TO KNOW.

AND WHAT IS *THAT,* MADAME PRESIDENT?

THAT HE IS A *HERO* WHO HAS RISKED HIS LIFE FOR THE UNION TIME AND AGAIN.

GOD OR MAN, REY HAS *ALWAYS* BEEN YOUR SUPERIOR, RANDEZEL.

THIS IS *IT!* THE *MAIN* CATHEDRAL!

YOU *HEARD* THE LADY! WE'VE *REACHED* OUR PRIME OBJECTIVE!

TAKE THESE GATORS *DOWN!*

THE TEMPLE INVIOLATE IS *OURS!* KHYRADON IS *HERE!*

KILL THE PRETENDER AND *SPARE* THE MATRIARCH!

THE V'KOON ARE *AVENGED,* MY BROTHERS!

DUH-DUH-DON'T HURT ME...

PLEASE...

WHERE IS KHYRADON?

I--I DON'T KNOW! HE LEFT TCHARUN DAYS AGO!

WHERE IS THE MATRIARCH?

SH-SH-SHE'S DEAD!

GONE?

DEAD?

HOW *LONG* UNTIL WE REACH THE SAURIAN FRONTIER, ADMIRAL?

SOON *ENOUGH*, COMMANDER REY.

I HAVE A UNIT THAT *MAY* BE IN A BAD WAY.

IF THEY'RE IN *LIZARD* SPACE, THEN I ASSURE YOU--

ROIYA!

NOT SURE HOW LONG I CAN *HOLD* THIS CONTACT, SAURI--

KHYRADON *ISN'T* ON TCHA'ON--

UNNH?

WHERE *IS* HE?

WE HAVE NO WAY OF *KNOWING.*

HOW CAN I *FIND* HIM?

THAT'S UP TO YOU--

--IN YOUR DISTANCE

I'M NOT *SURE* HOW THIS WORKS BUT HERE I GO.

REY? WHAT'S *HAPPENING?*

LAST

TIME

I DID

THIS

IT

TOOK

ME

RIGHT

--TO THE *TROUBLE* SPOT.

SAMANDAHL REY...

BET YOU DIDN'T SEE *ME* IN YOUR FUTURE, PROPHET.

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The moon- Vhrak-n'goth (T-5-SPGOD98687623-01-gr) in orbit around Vhrak-t'oth (T-5-SPGOD98687623-gr) found in the Thrith System in the aegis of the Saurian Hegemony.

VENGEFUL KHYALHTUA.

MIGHTY KHYALHTUA.

YOUR MOST LOYAL SUPPLICANT BEGS FOR STRENGTH.

BRING ME THE *COURAGE* I SEEK.

I SEEK TO *DESTROY* MY ENEMIES IN YOUR NAME.

INVEST ME WITH YOUR *WILL* AND YOUR *LIGHT*.

KHYRADON, YOU TROUBLE ME?

GODDESS?

HAVE I NOT SHARED ENOUGH WITH YOU?

AGAIN YOU COME WITH PALM EXTENDED.

THE HUMAN SAMANDAHL REY WILL BE COMING. I ASK ONLY FOR THE POWER TO DEFEAT HIM.

MORE GLORY TO YOU, SWEET AND TERRIBLE KHYALHTUA.

MY GLORY? IT WOULD SEEM YOU WISH ONLY TO ELEVATE YOURSELF.

NEVER!

ALL IS IN *TRIBUTE* TO YOU, KHYALHTUA!

THEN I SHALL GRANT YOU THIS BOON: THE MIGHT TO STAND BEFORE YOUR FOE.

JUST THIS LAST FAVOR, KHYRADON, AND THEN FAREWELL.

YOU GROW TIRES...

KHYALHTUA?

LORD KHYRADON?

YOU INTERRUPT ME AT ***PRAYER?***

THE PROJECT HANDLERS WISH YOUR ***ATTENTION.***

FOOLS! THEY CANNOT DECIDE THE MOST ***MINOR*** DETAIL ON THEIR OWN!

THE SUN-DAMPENER IS NEAR ***COMPLETION.***

IT WILL BE READY FOR ***LAUNCH*** THIS DAYCYCLE.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO, LORD KHYRADON?

"DO?"

YOU WILL *FIRE* IT!

THE HUMAN HOMEWORLD LIES IN *FRAGMENTS.*

THIS FINAL BLOW WILL RENDER THEIR RACE *IRRELEVANT.*

I...*WE* WILL BE UNOPPOSED IN THIS GALAXY.

WHAT ARE ALL OF YOU *STARING* AT?

THE HUMAN.

WHAT HUMAN?

SAMANDAHL REY...

YOU SHOULD SEE YOUR *FACE,* KHYRADON.

BET YOU DIDN'T SEE *ME* IN YOUR FUTURE, PROPHET.

THIS IS THE *END* FOR YOU.

YOU THINK TO *BEST* ME?

I AM NOT *LIKE* TCHLUSARUD, HUMAN.

I *KNOW* THAT.

YOU'LL BE *EASIER.*

NOW, LET'S LEVEL THE *ODDS* A LITTLE.

JUST YOU...

...AND *ME.*

SLASH

SMIRKING *SIMIAN!*

YOU WILL DIE *SHRIEKING!*

UNFF!

THIS IS HOW IT HAS TO END.

YOU HAVE A LOT OF *LIVES* TO PAY FOR.

I KILLED *BILLIONS* OF YOUR WEAKLING KIN.

BUT *YOUR* ONE DEATH WILL BE THE SWEETEST VENGEANCE.

BIG TALK.

AGGKH!

SO, YOU HAVE FOUND NEW ***DEPTHS*** OF POWER.

THEY WILL NOT BE ***ENOUGH.***

FOR I HAVE KHYALHTUA, SAURIAN GODDESS OF ***WAR,*** ON MY SIDE.

I WILL SPILL AN *OCEAN* OF BLOOD TO SEE YOU DEAD.

HUMAN *OR* SAURIAN.

THE GALAXY'S FUTURE IS *MINE!*

AND *NO* AMOUNT OF LIVES IS TOO GREAT A PRICE FOR THAT!

"I WOULD DESTROY *WORLDS* TO MAKE CERTAIN OF *YOUR* DESTRUCTION!"

Uh?

THE *WEIGHT* OF A SAURIAN DREADNAUGHT--

--AND ATTENDANT *RADIATION* STORM--

--SHOULD BE A LETHAL MIX EVEN FOR *YOU*.

SAMANDAHL REY...*HERO* TO THE LAST!

A *MARTYR* TO THE HUMAN RACE!

THE *FIRST* AMONG EQUALS--

--BECOMES THE FIRST *VICTIM* IN MY NEW ASSAULT ON THE PLANETARY UNION!

BILLIONS-- *HUNDREDS* OF BILLIONS WILL FOLLOW YOU, SAMANDAHL REY!

I WILL *DESTROY* YOUR SPECIES!

I WILL ERASE EVEN THE *MEMORY* OF HUMANKIND.

AND THERE WILL BE NO ONE TO OPPOSE ME--

NO--

-- ONE?

KHYRADON--

--YOU DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT WAR.

LET'S GO TO *SCHOOL.*

=UNNH!=

'CAUSE YOU'VE--

--GOT--

--A LOT--

--TO LEARN!

Uh?

WHO IS THE STUDENT *NOW,* HUMAN?

IT IS CALLED THE *SUN DAMPENER.*

IT SPEEDS TO THE *SUN* OF YOUR PRECIOUS HOME SYSTEM.

THERE IT WILL *KILL* YOUR STAR AND SUCK THE *HEAT* FROM A DOZEN OCCUPIED WORLDS.

NO!

I CAN'T LET THIS *HAPPEN*--

--I *ALREADY* SAVED GAIA TWICE.

⇶UNH⇷

--COME *ON,* REY--

--YOU--

⇶UH⇷

--*WEAK*-KNEED--

--SONOVA--

HUNH!

MORE--

COME ON--

AARRGH!

IT CANNOT BE...

"THAT WEAPON WAS MEANT TO COLLAPSE A *STAR*.

"THERE IS NO DATA ON ITS EFFECT ON A *PLANET*.

"I CAN ONLY POSTULATE *ONE* CERTAINTY--"

--YOU HAVE KILLED US *BOTH*.

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The moon, Vhrak-t'oth (T-5-SPG009887623-qr) is found in the Thrith System deep within the aegis of the Saurian Hegemony. It is a lifeless world though its only moon, Vhrak-n'goth (T-5-SPG009887623-01-qr), is home to a non-sentient crystalline lifeform.

"THE SUN-DAMPENER.

"A WEAPON DESIGNED TO SERVE AS AN ENORMOUS ***HEAT*** WELL.

"FIRED INTO THE HEART OF A SUN IT WOULD ABSORB THAT BODY'S ***WARMTH.***"

"BUT YOU HAVE UNLEASHED IT UPON A *PLANET.*

"THE WEAPON'S ABSORPTION RATE WILL QUICKLY *EXCEED* THE GEOTHERMIC HEAT AVAILABLE THERE.

"IT WILL DRAW WARMTH FROM THE *NEAREST* OBJECTS AROUND IT.

"THIS TINY *MOON.*

"ITS *NEIGHBORING* WORLDS.

"WITH NO WARMTH TO *SUSTAIN* IT--

"--THE ATMOSPHERE OF THIS MOON WILL *FREEZE*--

"--AND FALL AS *SNOW.*"

"SO, YOU HAVE ***SAVED*** YOUR RACE'S SUN.

"YOU HAVE ***SPARED*** YOUR MANY WORLDS A FROZEN DEATH.

"BUT AT WHAT *COST?*"

YOUR OWN ***DOOM,*** SAMANDAHL REY.

AND ***YOURS,*** KHYRADON.

LET'S NOT PASS OVER THE ***UPSIDE*** OF THIS DEAL.

I AM *INFUSED* WITH THE LIGHT OF THE GODDESS!

I AM A **DEITY!**

I AM **POWER** *INCARNATE!* **WILL** *INVIOLATE!*

AND YOU TALK TOO DAMNED MUCH.

...ENERGY... BUILDING... *TERMINAL* LEVELS...

TRYING... TO...*SCARE* ME... KHYRAPON?

...KILL US... BOTH...

...THEN LET'S...

...FINISH IT...

UH...

...UH...

...UH...

HUNH

I...

...I...

...I...
WON.

ZANNI ..

"YOUR ENTIRE *WORLD* IS UNSTABLE, SHAKEN TO ITS CORE."

SO--

--ARE YOU *CERTAIN* YOU DON'T NEED OUR HELP?

WE ARE *GRATEFUL* FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN ROOTING OUT KHYRADON'S FORCES.

BUT WE HAVE THE SITUATION *UNDER* CONTROL.

THIS IS ONLY ONE BASE, ONE *CELL* OF THE RADICALS. YOUR ENEMIES STILL CONTROL *MOST* OF THE PLANET, TCHLUSARUD.

YOU MAY NEED ALL THE HELP YOU CAN *GET* TO *STABILIZE* TCHARUN.

WE *HAVE* THE FIREPOWER. AND *MORE* ON THE WAY.

YES. YOU SPEAK OF SAMANDAHL REY.

I *KNOW* YOUR HISTORY WITH HIM.

ONLY *HIS* VERSION.

IT WOULD BE ***BEST*** WERE YOU GONE.

I CANNOT HOLD THE V'KOON TRIBES TOGETHER IN THE FACE OF THEIR ***DISTRUST*** OF HUMANS.

AND ***YOUR*** FEELINGS TOWARD HUMANS?

CAUTIOUS.

ALWAYS ***CAUTIOUS.***

YOU WOULD MAKE ***PEACE*** WITH THE HUMANS?

ONLY UNTIL OUR SCORES ARE SETTLED ***HERE.***

THEN WE STRIKE AS A ***UNITED*** SPECIES.

"*THEN* THEY WILL KNOW FEAR."

DO YOU *TRUST* HIM, ROIYA?

OUR OLD BUDDY *LOSER?*

NOT EVEN A *LITTLE* BIT, JeMERIK.

THEN WAR WILL *CONTINUE?*

AS SOON AS BOTH SIDES *RECOVER.*

AND WHY DO I GET THE FEELING YOU'RE *HAPPY* ABOUT THAT?

GROWTH *REQUIRES* CONFLICT, ROIYA.

REALLY.

TAKE *SAM,* FOR INSTANCE...

"HE IS FORCED BY EACH RISING THREAT TO ***EXPLORE*** THE ABILITIES GIVEN HIM BY THE SIGIL.

"THE ***GREATER*** THE THREAT, THE MORE STRENGTH HE UNCOVERS.

"HE HAS FACED INTERPLANETARY WAR AND ***LEARNED*** FROM THE CHALLENGES AND THE TRIUMPHS.

"BUT THERE IS ***SO*** MUCH MORE."

REPORT.

STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY ***HOLDING***. THE DOMES ARE FULLY POWERED AND MAINTAINING ATMOSPHERE.

LIFE SUPPORT OPTIMAL. WE HAVE SOME ***PECULIAR*** HEATING AND COOLING PROBLEMS, THOUGH.

ENGINEERING HERE. WE'RE WORKING ON MORE ***PERMANENT*** SHELTERS BENEATH THE SURFACE.

FOOD AND WATER ARE GOOD FOR A QUARTER CYCLE. RELIEF SUPPLIES HAVE BEEN ***PROMISED*** FROM OUT-SYSTEM SOURCES.

SO, WE ARE, AT THE VERY LEAST, ***SURVIVING*** ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT.

HOW GOES THE ***WAR*** EFFORT, ADMIRAL UMPALA?

VICTORY, MADAME PRESIDENT.

THE SAURIAN THREAT HAS BEEN ***NEUTRALIZED*** FOR THE MOMENT.

EARLY REPORTS SAY KHYRADON HAS BEEN ***PERSONALLY*** ELIMINATED BY GENERAL REY.

AND THE LIZARDS ARE ENGAGED IN A ***CIVIL WAR*** ON THEIR HOMEWORLD.

PERHAPS ***NOW*** IS THE TIME TO ***PRESS*** OUR ADVANTAGE.

WE COULD ***TAKE*** THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CRIPPLE THEIR WAR-MAKING CAPABILITIES FOREVER.

WE MAY NEVER ***GET*** ANOTHER CHANCE LIKE THIS.

CAN'T!

KHYRADON IS **DEAD**. THE MATRIARCH IS **DEAD**. TCHARUN IS IN **CHAOS**.

AND GAIA IS NOTHING BUT SPACE **DEBRIS**.

YOU'RE ***SAYING...***

I'VE ***FOUGHT*** THE SAURIANS. THEY DON'T ADMIT THEIR OWN WEAKNESSES. BUT THEY'LL DAMN SURE SEE ***OURS***.

IF WE DO ***ANY***THING TO THREATEN THEM NOW, THEY'LL ***END*** THEIR CIVIL WAR AND BAND ***AGAINST*** US.

AND HOW CAN WE ***HOPE*** TO PROTECT A HUNDRED-THOUSAND-MILE-LONG ARC OF ASTEROIDS?

I'M RETURNING TO GAIA BY FASTEST ROUTE. REY OUT.

YOUR ASSESSMENT, UMPALA?

I ***AGREE*** WE SHOULD STAND DOWN AND PUT OUR EFFORTS INTO ***DEFENSE*** FOR NOW.

I BOW TO BOTH YOUR JUDGMENTS THEN.

I CAN ONLY HOPE WE NEVER ***REGRET*** OUR CAUTION...

"...AND THAT THERE ISN'T A NASTY *SURPRISE* LURKING SOMEWHERE."

--PUT IN SOMEWHERE TO MAKE REPAIRS

HAS THERE BEEN CONTACT FROM SAM?

NOTHING YET.

DO I HAVE *CAUSE* TO WORRY, JeMERIK?

WHY ASK *ME*, ZANNI?

YOU KNOW PERFECTLY *WELL* WHY SHE'S ASKING--

IS SOMETHING *WRONG?* WHERE'S SAM?

WHO ARE--

IT'S...

...ME.

JeMERIK, WHAT'S GOING *ON?*

I WISH I BLOODY WELL *KNEW.*

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BUSY?

HELL, YEAH.

KEEPING AN EYE ON THAT GAS CLUSTER OUT THERE.

WAY I FIGURE IT, THERE'S A *GOOD* CHANCE IT'LL MOVE TWO EGRONS CLOSER TO GALACTIC CENTER IN...

...oh...A *TRILLION* YEARS.

WHAT'D WE *DO* TO DESERVE THIS?

I KNOW WHAT *I* DID...

YOU BOLLIXED THAT WAVE RESISTANCE TEST ON PHAETON NINE.

I *TOLD* YOU THAT?

A HUNDRED TIMES. *THIS* WEEK.

PUMM PUMM

YOU HEAR THAT *NOISE*?

IT'S COMING FROM...

PUMM PUMM

OUTSIDE.

WHOA.

PUMM PUMM

"SOME-- SOMETHING'S NOT *RIGHT*."

I MUST HAVE TAKEN A SHOT TO THE *HEAD* OR--

--HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN *OUT?*

YOU MEAN HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN *DEAD?*

A LOT'S HAPPENED WHILE YOU-- *WE*--WERE GONE.

"WE?"

I DON'T--

--UNDERSTAND.

Oh

NONE OF THIS MAKES ANY *SENSE.*

YOU'D BETTER LIE DOWN, ROIYA.

LIE DOWN?

APPARENTLY I'VE DONE ENOUGH OF *THAT* TO LAST ME A WHILE.

WHAT'S WITH THE *HOLO-GRAM?*

DID SAM MISS ME THAT *MUCH?*

IT'S MORE *COMPLICATED* THAN THAT. BUT WE'VE ALL *MISSED* YOU, ROIYA.

AND WHO EXACTLY ARE *YOU?*

Uh...

WHAT A *PLEASANT* SURPRISE. *TWO* ROIYAS.

PLEASANT FOR *WHO,* JeMERIK?

YOUR *CHARMING* COMPANY TIMES TWO.

YOU AMAZE ME SOMETIMES.

REALLY?

CAN'T YOU SEE THE PAIN I'M-- *SHE'S*-- IN?

SHE'S COMPLETELY *LOST.* AND WHAT HAPPENS TO *ME* NOW?

SAM?

WHERE'S *SAM?*

A LITTLE -- *NIPPY* OUT THERE, huh?

SOMETHING *HOT* TO DRINK, GENERAL?

SAM.

JUST CALL ME *SAM.*

Uh...

OKAY-- SAM.

IS HE *DEAD?*

ASLEEP.

THE GUY'S TRAVELED FROM *THRITH* SYSTEM UNDER HIS OWN POWER.

TCHARUN: THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD.

HOLD.

I HEAR AN ENGINE.

GENERAL TCHLUSARUD, THIS SCOUT FORCE IS ***ALL*** THAT STANDS BETWEEN US AND THE CITY OF S'RHNNA.

THEY ***REINFORCED*** THE NORTHERN AND WESTERN APPROACHES.

THE OPPOSITION NEVER ***ANTICIPATED*** AN ATTACK OVER THE GREAT MARSH.

GAAH!

I BEG TO *DIFFER,* GENERAL. THERE *WAS* A MOBILE UNIT IN PLACE ON THE EAST FRONTIER.

I *KNOW,* LORD H'CKHABBA.

YOURS.

UNTIL YOU SAW THE *WISDOM* OF JOINING *MY* CAUSE.

IT WILL SUIT THOSE FAT TOADS IN THE CAPITAL *WELL,* TCHLUSARUD.

FOR *BANISHING* ME TO THESE WRETCHED CLIMES.

HAHA HAHAHA HA!

IF WE CAN BUT TAKE THE CAPITAL AT S'HRNNA IN *TIME.*

WE SHALL HAVE THE UPPER HAND *AND* WILL HAVE CUT THEIR FORCES IN *HALF.*

"THEN THE WAR WILL END AND *RETRIBUTION* BEGIN."

Uh... LIKE, WE UNDERSTAND YOU'RE ON A MISSION AND ALL...

...BUT *STARBUNNY'S* OUR ONLY WAY OFF THIS STATION.

I HAVE TO GET *BACK* TO GALACTIC UNION CENTER.

YOUR SHUTTLE'S THE ONLY RIDE *OUT* OF HERE.

I'LL HAVE THEM SEND *BACK* A TRANSPORT FOR YOU.

HOW LONG'S IT GONNA *TAKE?*

YOU *SURE* ABOUT THIS, SAM?

WHAT DO YOU *WANT?*

A *RECEIPT?*

TO STATIONS, PEOPLE.

WE'RE ON PATH TO ENTER THE WORM-HOLE.

BETTER *SECURE* YOUR MARINES, MITH.

DONE AND DONE.

THIS ROIYA IS THE ONE *YOU'RE* BASED ON?

I--*SHE* WAS FATALLY *INJURED* IN AN ATTACK ON TANIPAL.

SAM'S BEEN KEEPING ME IN STASIS.

I GUESS SOMEHOW HIS POWERS REVIVED ME--OR *HER*. ACTUALLY, *I'M* AS CONFUSED AS ANYONE.

SO... SHE'S NOT *ATTACHED* TO ANYONE.

ARE YOU PLANNING ON *HITTING* ON HER?

HEY, CAN'T *BLAME* A GUY.

HOLD THAT DISGUSTING THOUGHT.

DIAGNOSTICS PICKED UP AN ANOMALY ON THE *HULL*.

TREEP!

BUT WE'RE *NEXT* FOR ENTRY INTO THE WORMHOLE.

THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO MOVE--

--FAST.

A LIZARD DEVICE. *NOT* GOOD.

IT'S A RUNNING *READ-OUT.*

WISH I KNEW HOW TO *COUNT* IN SAURIAN.

THEN SAM IS LIKE--A *HERO?*

HE CERTAINLY *IS.* HE'S BEEN *PROMOTED* TO GENERAL.

GENERAL? *SAM?*

HE *SAVED* GAIA AND *DEFEATED* THE SAURIAN WEAPONS-MASTER.

AND THIS HOLOGRAPHIC *PROGRAM* OF ME?

SHE HAS ALL THE MEMORIES OF WHAT'S *HAPPENED* WHILE I WAS COMATOSE?

THAT ROIYA IS *MORE* THAN A PROGRAM. SHE WAS CREATED AS A *BYPRODUCT* OF SAM'S POWERS-- OR HIS *GRIEF.*

ALTHOUGH SHE HAS NO *PHYSICAL* FORM, SHE'S QUITE *REAL* TO *ALL* OF US.

BUT I'M *BACK,* ZANNI. WE DON'T *NEED* ANOTHER ME.

CAN'T WE *DELETE* IT?

I--

THIS IS A STRICTLY *UN*EDUCATED GUESS...

...LOOKS LIKE THE *END* OF THE COUNTDOWN.

SOMETHING'S GONE *WRONG!*

ROIYA!

I HAVE TO GET TO THE *COMMAND DECK* AND TAKE THE CONTROLS!

WHAT'S GOING *ON,* JeMERIK?

A SAURIAN *DEFENSIVE* MINE ATTACHED TO US.

IT TOOK OUT A STABILIZER AND RIGHT ENGINE NACELLE.

WE'RE IN A *TUMBLE.*

THESE CONTROLS ARE *DEAD!* HOW CAN I RESTORE--

I'M DOING IT.

WHAT?

SYSTEMS BACK ONLINE. ADJUSTING OUR TRAJECTORY TOWARD NORMAL.

BUT I HAVE A *FEELING* --

-- WE'RE NOT GOING TO COME OUT OF THIS WHERE WE *WANTED* TO.

"MAYBE NOT EVEN ANY PLACE WE EVER *HEARD* OF."

CAPTAIN?

THIS BETTER BE *URGENT,* RECRUIT.

THERE'S AN *UNIDENTIFIED* VESSEL APPROACHING FROM SAURIAN SPACE.

DAMN.

IT'S *OLD,* BUT IT'S STILL UNION MANUFACTURE.

REALLY, SIR?

A WALANDO T-78. BEFORE YOUR *TIME.* FIND OUT WHO'S *ABOARD.*

GENERAL SAMANDAHL REY, *WELCOME* ABOARD THE *DEFIANCE*.

CAPTAIN.

NOT EVERY DAY WE GET SOMEONE OF *YOUR* IMPORTANCE ON DECK.

LET ME *TELL* YOU, THIS SHIP WAS A SWEET SIGHT.

EARLY REPORTS ARE THAT THE SAURIANS ARE IN DISARRAY AND *YOU* KILLED THEIR LEADER.

THAT'S THE *BROAD* DETAILS, SKIPPER.

BUT RIGHT NOW ALL I WANT TO DO IS GET BACK TO THE *BITTERLUCK* AND MY CREW.

I'M *SORRY*, GENERAL. YOU HAVEN'T *HEARD*.

HEARD *WHAT?*

"THE *BITTERLUCK* WENT ***MISSING*** ON THE JUMP FROM TCHARUN."

SO, WHERE ***ARE*** WE?

HARD TO GET A ***PRECISE*** FIX. WE'RE ***WAY*** OUT GALACTIC NORTH, SEVENTY DEGREES.

THAT'S THE ***BEST*** YOU CAN DO?

SAM EXPECTED MORE ***EXACT*** COORDINATES WHEN ***I*** WAS PILOT.

NICE.

IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAVE MUCH ***CHOICE*** OF DESTINATIONS.

WE NEED RAW MATERIALS AND WATER IF WE'RE GOING TO MAKE ***REPAIRS***.

AND HOW WILL ***YOU*** MAKE REPAIRS? IT'S ***NOT*** LIKE YOU CAN PICK UP A ***SPANNER***.

IS THIS WHAT I'M ***LIKE?*** IT'S A WONDER ANYONE CAN ***STAND*** ME.

THIS PLACE *SEEMS* PEACEFUL ENOUGH, JONS.

SURE. WHAT WE CAN *SEE.*

ROIYA--THE ONE *I* KNOW--SAYS THE LIFEFORM READINGS WERE *OFF* THE GRID.

STANDS TO *REASON,* ZANNI--

--AT LEAST *ONE* OF 'EM WILL HAVE A TASTE FOR MEAT.

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THERE ARE AN ***INFINITE*** NUMBER OF FACTORS TO CONSIDER HERE, COMMANDER REY.

A SHIP THAT DROPPED FROM A SPATIAL GATEWAY BEFORE REACHING ITS ***ASSIGNED*** DESTINATION WOULD NOT ***NECESSARILY*** EMERGE IN SPACE BETWEEN THE ENTRANCE AND EXIT OF THAT GATEWAY.

CAN I HAVE AN ***ANSWER*** INSTEAD OF A SCIENCE LESSON?

Urmm -- PLAINLY AND SIMPLY--

--THE CREW OF THE *BITTERLUCK*--

--COULD BE ***ANYWHERE*** IN THE UNIVERSE.

AND HOW CAN WE ***FIND*** THEM?

WE HAVE TO HOPE THAT THEY'RE ***CAPABLE*** OF SENDING A SUB-SPACE TRANSMISSION.

AND THAT THEY'RE NOT SO FAR AWAY THAT BY THE TIME WE ***REACH*** THEM--

"--THEY'RE CENTURIES *DEAD.*"

LOOK AT *THIS.*

CUTE.

UNNAMED BODY -SYS-
XT666570D0-9-GN73:0907806875

YOU'RE WALKING ***DRAG,*** NOT STRAGGLING, JAGER.

I ***HEAR*** YOU, CAPTAIN MITH.

READINGS SHOW LIFE FORMS. WE'RE NOT SURE WHERE WE ***STAND*** ON THE FOOD CHAIN HERE.

LET'S ***TRY*** TO IMPACT THE ENVIRONMENT AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE, JONS.

IT DOESN'T IMPACT ON *ME,* I WON'T HAVE TO IMPACT ON *IT,* ZANNI.

TIGHTEN *UP,* PEOPLE. EYES *OPEN.*

WE'LL GET WHAT WE NEED TO REPAIR THE *BITTERLUCK* AND GET *OFF* THIS PLANET.

"PERSONALLY, I *HATE* THESE UNSURVEYED WORLDS."

HA!

NOT AS MUCH AS *I* HATE THESE UNSCHEDULED STOPS, LADY.

BUT SINCE WE GOT BOLLIXED BY THAT SAURIAN MAG-BOMB WE'RE FRESH OUT OF *OPTIONS.*

THERE'S AN OPEN BODY OF *LIQUID* AHEAD.

HEY, LITTLE GUYS--

--ONE AT A TIME--

-- OKAY?

=NUH=
=NUH=
=GURRGH=

=NNGGGG=

JAGER DROPPED BACK AGAIN, DAMN IT!

BEEMER! HAXTA! GO CATCH HER *UP!*

YO!

JUST *AHEAD,* JONS--

"--WE GET THE WATER WE NEED AND GET *OUT* OF HERE."

ZANNI AND THE OTHERS HAVE FOUND A SOURCE FOR FUEL CONVERSION.

HOW ARE REPAIRS GOING, JeMERIK AND --um--

--ROIYA?

YOU-- *SHE*-- WELL, REPAIRS ARE MOVING APACE.

THAT LIZARD ***TRAP*** DEVICE KNOCKED HELL OUT OF THE STABILIZER AND PORT FUEL NACELLES.

NO CRITICAL STRUCTURE FAULTS I CAN ***SEE***. BUT THIS ISN'T THE *BITTERLUCK* I ***REMEMBER***.

IT'S ***NOT***. ONE OF SAM'S ABILITIES IS MANIPULATING INANIMATE SUBSTANCES.

HE *"BUILT"* THIS *BITTERLUCK* FROM RAW MATERIAL USING ONLY THE POWER OF HIS ***MIND***.

SHAME HE'S NOT HERE ***NOW***.

WE CAN *FIX* THIS. AS LONG AS WE CAN PATCH THE *NACELLES* WE'LL BE ABLE TO--

WHAT'S ALL THIS "*WE*" NOISE? YOU CAN'T EVEN PICK UP A *TOOL*.

SOUNDS LIKE SOMEONE'S JEALOUS OF *HERSELF*.

YOU'RE NOT ME. YOU'RE JUST SOME *TRICK* OF THE LIGHT.

SOME *TRICK*. I'VE GUIDED THE *BITTERLUCK*--

--TO WRECK ON AN OFF-CHART *HELLHOLE*.

LADIES, *PLEASE!*

THERE'S NO *CAUSE* FOR THIS BICKERING.

I GUESS *NOT*, JeMERIK. WHY GET ANGRY AT AN OPTICAL *ILLUSION*?

I'M *MORE* THAN THAT. I'M A FULLY FUNCTIONING VERSION OF YOU--*ME*.

DID YOU SAY, *FULLY* FUNCTIONING?

PLEASE, LET'S PUT ASIDE YOUR--ah--DIFFERENCES AND WORK *TOGETHER*.

TRUST ME--

"-- IT WOULD BE ***UNWISE*** TO STAY HERE ANY LONGER THAN NECESSARY."

JAGER. .

MAN...

HAXTA-- REPORT.

NOT SURE, SIR. IT LOOKS LIKE JAGER --

JAGER ***WHAT?***

NNGH←

CUT OFF. SOME KIND OF ***INTERFERENCE.***

THE CRAWLER'S TANKS WILL BE ***FULL*** SOON, JONS.

WE CAN PICK THEM UP ON THE WAY BACK TO THE *BITTERLUCK.*

YEAH.

"I JUST DON'T KNOW WHY THEY GOTTA ACT LIKE KIDS ON A ***FIELD*** TRIP."

JONS!

WELL, THERE'S ROIYA'S LIFE FORMS!

POWER UP, TROOPS! ***HOSTILES*** IN THE PERIMETER!

UNARMED ***NON-SENTIENT*** STATUS!

HOW CAN YOU BE ***SURE?***

ANYTHING THAT ATTACKS ***ME*** HAS MORE GUTS THAN ***BRAINS,*** LADY.

TAKE 'EM ***DOWN*** AND FALL BACK TO THE CRAWLER!

YOU DON'T EVEN *REMEMBER* WHAT'S HAPPENED SINCE WE BLASTED OUT OF TANIPAL.

BECAUSE IT *DIDN'T* HAPPEN TO *ME,* STUPID!

IT HAPPENED TO *ME!*

AS *DATA.* YOU'RE A TECHNO-*GHOST!*

Oh!

WHAT'S THE *MATTER,* HOLOROID? A GLITCH IN YOUR *PROGRAM?*

ZANNI AND THE OTHERS ARE UNDER *ATTACK!*

SO, YOU'RE RUNNING *AWAY?* COME BACK HERE!

WE'RE IN *DANGER,* ROIYA. WE NEED TO GET *INTO* THE SHIP AND ACCESS THE LEVEL OF THREAT.

"THIS PLANET IS PROVING *DIFFICULT.*"

THERE'S TOO *MANY!*

THERE'S LESS *NOW,* ZANNI!

FALL BACK TO THE *CRAWLER.*

HALLENDAR! GIVE US SOME *SUPPRESSION!*

GOT YOUR BACK, CAPTAIN!

IT'S *ALL* A CLEAR FIELD OF FIRE!

OPEN UP ON 'EM!

GOOD *WORK,* PEOPLE.

KEEP YOUR *EDGE.*

WE'RE *GONE* AS SOON AS THE TANKS ARE TOPPED.

SO, WE FOUND OUT THEY *SCARE.*

THEY *DO.* BUT NOT BECAUSE OF *US.*

THEY WITHDREW BECAUSE OF *THAT.*

WHOA.

ANY IDEA WHAT IT *IS?!*

IT'S *HUNGRY!*

TO THE CRAWLER!

GO! GO! GO!

YOU'RE ***WAY*** OUT OF LINE, REY!

DESPITE YOUR ASSURANCES THAT THE SAURIANS ARE OUT OF THE FIGHT, WE'RE ***STILL*** ON A WAR ALERT.

I ***CAN'T*** DIVERT THE FLEET OR ***ANY*** OF OUR SCANNING ARRAY TO HUNT FOR YOUR FRIENDS.

THEY'RE ***NOT*** JUST MY FRIENDS. THEY'RE THE ***HEROES*** OF TCHARUN.

THEY DID ***MORE*** TO NEGATE THE SAURIAN THREAT THAN ANYONE.

I SYMPATHIZE. I ***DO***. BUT THAT'S ***ALL*** I CAN DO.

BUT UNLESS I RECEIVE ORDERS FROM THE ***UNION PRESIDENT***--

--THE *BITTERLUCK* IS ON ITS ***OWN***.

UNNAMED BODY -SYS-
XT5566570000-9-GN73-090780158875

I DON'T *UNDERSTAND.* DID YOU DO ANYTHING TO *ANTAGONIZE* IT?

ANTAG--?! WE'RE *DINNER,* ROIYA! THIS PLANET IS ALL-YOU-CAN-*EAT!*

GET *INSIDE,* JONS!

?!

BUT WHAT ABOUT--

ROIYA!

BUT *ROIYA* WAS--

ROIYA'S *FINE.*

SHE'S *ZERO*-CALORIE, REMEMBER?

VERY ICKY.

BUT THE CRAWLER SHOULD *OUTDISTANCE* IT IN NO TIME.

THAT SNOTPILE IS *HUNGRY.* IT'LL CATCH UP *EVENTUALLY.*

WE GET TANKED UP AND THE CONVERTERS CRANKING AND WE CAN LIFT *CLEAR* OF THIS AREA.

SIMPLE AS *THAT?*

SIMPLER THE BETTER. *THAT* WAY--

"--THERE'S LESS THAT CAN GO *WRONG*."

TCHARUN: HOMEWORLD OF THE FORMER SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

SAURIAN HIGH FRONTIER COMMAND FACILITY NORTHERN HEMISPHERE.

HOW WILL TAKING *THIS* REMOTE FORTRESS AID US IN CONQUERING THE CAPITAL OF S'RHNNA, GENERAL TCHLUSARUD?

PATIENCE, KCHASKCHA.

S'RHNNA IS STILL THE *KEY* TO SETTLING THIS INTERNECINE WAR IN OUR FAVOR.

THANKS TO GENERAL H'CKHABBA, WE ARE OFFERED A MORE *ELEGANT* SOLUTION.

AN *ALTERNATIVE* TO SEASONS OF BLOODY FIGHTING TO TAKE THE CITY BY FORCE.

S'RHNNA IS *STILL* LOYAL TO KHYRADON AND HIS FANATICS. WE WOULD NEED TO BESIEGE AND *OCCUPY* THE CITY.

THEN FACE A POSSIBLE *RESURGENCE* OF HOSTILITIES IN THAT PIT OF TRAITORS.

MY NEW REGIME WOULD *CONSTANTLY* BE CHALLENGED.

WE HAVE *ACQUIRED* THE SATELLITE, GENERAL.

AND IT IS *FULLY* ARMED?

A *COMPLETE* COMPLEMENT OF WEAPONRY.

SUCH IS THE *FATE* OF S'RHNNA THEN.

SUCH IS THE FATE OF *ALL* WHO OPPOSE MY NEW ORDER.

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XT666570D0-9-GN73.090780687S

NOW WHAT?

THIS IS *NOT* GOOD.

YOU HAVE A *TALENT* FOR UNDERSTATEMENT, ROIYA.

WHAT'S GOING *ON?* I THOUGHT WE WERE *SAFE* IN HERE!

COOL YOUR *THRUSTERS,* TROOP!

IT'S NOT OUR *JOB* TO BE SAFE.

IT'S A *FAIR* QUESTION, CAPTAIN MITH.

ALL *RIGHT* THEN, ZANNI. ANY *GUESSES?*

IT'S TOO *FAST* TO GET AWAY FROM.

AND TOO BIG TO GET *IN* HERE.

YOU KNOW WHAT *I* THINK?

PLEASE SHARE, JONS.

I THINK THE ARMORED ROVER IS THE *NUTSHELL.*

AND *WE'RE* THE MEAT?

RIGHT! ANYONE THAT WANTS OFF THE MENU, FOLLOW ME!

THERE'S NO WAY CLEAR!

MOVE ASIDE, LADIES.

NOTHING ELSE WORKED AGAINST THIS SLUG.

LET'S TRY SOME FROSTBITE.

WITH ANY LUCK IT WON'T FEEL THIS WOUND UNTIL IT THAWS.

MOVE, GUYS! THIS IS THE ONLY EXIT.

WE'RE STICKING! NO WAY WE'RE LETTING THAT THING CATCH US IN THE OPEN.

HOLD THE FORT, THEN.

I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO FROM THE BITTERLUCK.

YOU *SURE* WE MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE?

THAT'S *FOUR* INCHES OF IRIDIUM STEEL. *NOTHING'S* GETTING --

--THROUGH THAT.

WHAT *IS* THAT?

WHO *CARES? WASTE* IT!

GAAAARK

EEEYAARGH!

THEY *STOPPED* SCREAMING.

THAT MEANS ONLY *ONE* THING -- THAT MOUNTAIN OF SNOT IS COMING FOR *US*.

WE HAVE TO GET TO THE *BITTERLUCK* ON *FOOT*, JONS.

TALL ORDER, ZANNI. THAT UGLY'S GOT A *LOT* MORE FEET THAN US.

THERE *HAS* TO BE A WAY TO OUTWIT IT.

MY ONLY STRATEGY IS TO RUN LIKE HELL. BE NICE IF YOUR *BOYFRIEND* WAS HERE.

SAM DOESN'T KNOW WHERE WE *ARE*, JONS.

WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE WE ARE.

ZANNI AND THE MARINES ARE ***TRAPPED***. WE HAVE TO--

WE HAVE PROBLEMS OF OUR ***OWN***, SISTER.

A DISMAL TURN OF EVENTS, MY DEAR ROIYA.

THE ***FAUNA*** OF THIS WORLD HAVE CHOSEN TO CONVERGE ON THE *BITTERLUCK*.

AND THEY HAVE AN EVIL MANNER ABOUT THEM THAT I SUSPECT IS ***HUNGER***.

THERE'S ***MILLIONS*** OF THEM, JeMERIK.

A ***CONSERVATIVE*** ESTIMATE, I FEAR. THE ENTIRE ***POPULATION*** OF THIS PLANET IS BENT ON CONSUMPTION.

SO...WHY AREN'T THEY ***ATTACKING?*** THEY DON'T FEAR OUR WEAPONS.

WHAT'S MAKING THEM HANG ***BACK?***

THEY FEAR ***SOMETHING*** ABOARD THE SHIP.

WHAT.

"SO THERE'S ***HOPE?***"

STAR POSITION -SYS-
GC0000976-7-6SW00.
00000876-54

THE SIGNAL IS *FAINT.* NO MESSAGE.

IS IT FROM THE *BITTERLUCK?*

IT'S NOT JUST STAR NOISE. A ***BEACON*** TRANSMISSION.

IS IT FROM THE *BITTERLUCK?*

DIFFICULT TO ***SAY,*** COMMANDER REY.

IT'S COMING FROM QUADRANT XT66657.

THERE ARE NO KNOWN SENTIENT SOURCES ANYWHERE ***NEAR*** THAT AREA.

SO, THIS COULD ***WORK.***

POSSIBLY.

BUT IT ***COULD*** WORK.

THEORETICALLY.

THAT'S ***OKAY,*** DOC--

"--MY WHOLE *LIFE* IS BASED ON A THEORY."

IT'S *YOU.*

WHAT'S ME?

THE REASON THOSE THINGS *AREN'T* ATTACKING.

LADIES...

THAT'S A *GOOD* THING, RIGHT?

NOT IF IT TURNS OUT THAT YOU'RE *NOT* WHAT YOU SEEM.

...

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S NOT WHAT I SEEM, HOLO-GIRL.

I WAS HERE *FIRST,* REMEMBER.

I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT THAT.

MEANING?

YOU JUST STEP OUT OF A STASIS CHAMBER AFTER *ALL* THIS TIME?

BECAUSE SAM *WANTED* ME TO.

THIS MAY INTEREST YOU TWO.

EW

REPULSIVE.

THEY CANNOT CONSUME *US* SO THEY TURN UPON ONE ANOTHER.

LARGE OR SMALL, *EACH* IS FOOD FOR THE OTHER.

A *PLANET* OF CARNIVORES. FASCINATING, *ISN'T* IT?

RIGHT, JeMERIK. EXCEPT ZANNI AND JONS ARE *OUT* IN THAT FEEDING FRENZY--

"--AND I'M NOT SURE THEY *SHARE* YOUR APPRECIATION."

SEE ANY WAY *CLEAR,* JONS?

WALL-TO-WALL *UGLIES* IS WHAT I SEE, ZANNI.

THIS CHOWLINE IS BACKED UP TO THE *HORIZON*.

RUNNING LOW ON *CHARGES*, CAPPY.

THIS IS HOPELESS. THERE'S NO *END* TO THEM.

NO...

SINCE I PROBABLY WON'T EVER *GET* ANOTHER CHANCE --

YES, JONS?

I WANTED TO *ASK* YOU SOMETHING, ZANNI.

IF *SAM* WEREN'T IN THE PICTURE, DO YOU THINK THAT YOU AND ME MIGHT HAVE --

SURE, JONS.

SURE.

"WHAT THE *DEVIL'S* GOING ON HERE?"

STAR POSITION -SYS-
GC00009876-7-GSW00-0000087654

WHO *AUTHORIZED* FIRING UP THE ARC DRIVE?

Um-- COMMANDER *REY* GAVE THE ORDER.

WELL-- um--

AND WHAT WAS COMMANDER REY'S *REASON* FOR THAT?

"--WE RECEIVED A WEAK *BEACON* SIGNAL FROM GALACTIC NORTH IN AN UNCHARTED QUADRANT.

"THE COMMANDER ASKED ME TO *LOCK* ON TO THE SOURCE AND OPEN AN ARC GATEWAY TO THAT REGION.

"I POSTULATE THAT HE'LL EMERGE WITHIN *STRIKING* DISTANCE OF THE BEACON'S TRANSMITTER."

"AND IF YOUR POSTULATIONS ARE *WRONG*?"

"THEN WE'LL NEVER SEE SAMANDAHL REY *AGAIN*."

UNNAMED BODY -SYS-
-XT6665700-5-6N73:0907806875

I'M DOWN TO *NOTHING*, ZANN!

LESS THAN *TEN* PERCENT PULSE CHARGE.

THEN ALL WE CAN HOPE IS THEY *CHOKE* ON US.

ZANN! HEADS UP!

OWW!

GREAT, ANOTHER ENTRÉE FOR THE *BUFFET*.

HOW DOES *SHE* HELP?

HEY!

YOU'LL SEE, ZAN.

NICE *TOSS*, JeMERIK.

I DID *NOT* ENJOY THAT.

WELL, I *DID*.

THE CREATURES, THEY'RE BACKING *AWAY*.

I'LL *KILL* HER!

DO IT ON YOUR *OWN* TIME, LADY!

HOW IS THIS *HAPPENING?*

WHO *CARES?* LET'S GET WHILE WE *CAN*.

MOVE IT!

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE CAN STAY *ALOFT* IN THIS ATMOSPHERE!

GOODBYE TO *THIS* MISERABLE ROCK.

LOST TOO MANY *FRIENDS* HERE.

ARE THE *REPAIRS* MADE, ROIYA?

NO *TIME*, NO *MATERIALS*, ZAN.

SO WE'RE *STUCK*.

BUT NOT *DINNER*--

--THANKS TO *HER*.

AND HOW EXACTLY *IS* THAT?

DON'T ASK *ME*.

MAYBE SOME *ENERGY* LEFT OVER WHEN SAM TRIED TO REVIVE HER.

I THINK THERE'S *MORE* HERE THAN SIMPLE RESIDUAL POWER.

GATEWAY OPENING.

NOW WHAT?

SMALL OBJECT EMERGING FROM THE GATEWAY.

POINT SEVEN-SEVEN LIGHT AND *CLOSING* ON US.

A *WEAPON*, ROIYA?

NO...

IT'S--

SAM!!

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THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD OF TCHARUN.

ARE YOU *RESOLVED* TO DO THIS, GENERAL TCHLUSARUD?

IT IS THE *ONLY* WAY.

PREPARE THE WEAPON.

"THE CAPITAL OF S'RHNNA IS THE FINAL STRONGHOLD OF KHYRADON'S HOLDOUTS.

"TO USE CONVENTIONAL GROUND FORCES WOULD COST MY ARMY COUNTLESS LIVES.

"IN THE END WE WOULD TRIUMPH--

"--OVER A CITY OF *RADICALS* AND *MALCONTENTS.*

"BETTER TO DISPOSE OF THEM *ENTIRELY.*"

"I DO *NOT* WISH ANY NASTY SURPRISES IN MY FUTURE."

SAM!

ROIYA?

WHY THE *RECEPTION?* HAVE I BEEN GONE THAT LONG?

NO. BUT *I* HAVE.

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN?*

HEY--

--I CAN *TOUCH* YOU.

WHAT DID YOU *EXPECT,* YOU BIG DOPE!

BUT-- I DON'T *GET* IT.

NEITHER DO *WE.*

"LET ME EXPLAIN..."

...SO, WHATEVER MOJO YOU WORKED JUST TOOK *TIME,* SAM.

BUT I DIDN'T THINK OF *THIS.*

I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT WHEN *YOU* WOKE UP--

ROIYA?

TWO ROIYAS?

--THAT *YOU'D* STILL BE HERE.

WHAT'S YOUR *TAKE* ON THIS, JeMERIK? YOU KNOW *EVERY-THING,* RIGHT?

AS MUCH AS IT *PAINS* ME TO SAY THIS, SAM--

--I AM AS MUCH IN THE DARK AS *YOU* ARE.

I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF *THAT.*

IT'S GOOD TO *SEE* YOU, ROIYA. YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW *MUCH.*

SO WE DON'T *NEED* THE DIGITAL AVATAR, RIGHT?

NOW THAT THE REAL THING IS BACK, WE CAN *ERASE* HER.

NO WAY.

WE'VE BECOME *ATTACHED* TO HER. SHE'S AS REAL TO US AS *YOU* ARE.

THANKS, SAM.

SAM...

THAT'S *IT?* I HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THIS *CARTOON?*

I GUESS *ONE* OF YOU ISN'T ENOUGH, ROIYA.

YOU *SHOULD* BE FLATTERED.

FLATTERED?

SAM, I'VE LOCATED A *SOURCE* FOR RAW MATERIALS FOR REPAIRS TO THE *BITTERLUCK.*

A *PLANET* WITH ORE DEPOSITS, ZANNI?

BETTER THAN THAT.

MISSED.

OO!

A *DEBRIS* FIELD TRAPPED IN THE EVENT HORIZON OF A GRAVITY WELL.

A *GRAVEYARD* OF SHIPS FROM ALL OVER THE GALAXY.

BILLIONS OF OBJECTS MADE FROM ALREADY REFINED MATERIAL.

THESE HULKS MUST HAVE BEEN DRAGGED HERE FROM WHO-*KNOWS*-WHERE.

I DUNNO. I LIKE TO KEEP MY *DISTANCE* FROM BLACK HOLES.

WE STAY WITHIN THE HORIZON AND WE'RE *SAFE*, JONS.

SEE ANYTHING YOU CAN USE, SAM?

MORE OF A CASE OF *OPTION* PARALYSIS, ROIYA.

YOU'D BETTER COME OUT HERE AND *HELP* WITH THE ENGINEERING.

REMEMBER ALL THE TIMES WE ***DREAMED*** OF THE SHIP WE'D BUILD IF WE HAD ALL THE MONEY IN THE UNIVERSE?

I'VE BEEN DRAWING UP SOME ***PLANS*** IN MY SPARE NANO-MOMENTS.

LIKE IT?

VERY PRETTY, PARTNER.

WE USE THE MATERIAL FROM ***TRENIN'S*** SHIP TO SHIELD HER.

AND WE INCREASE THE ***INTERIOR*** SPACE BY A FACTOR OF TEN.

A WEAPONS ARRAY EQUAL TO A SHIP A ***HUNDRED*** TIMES THE SIZE OF THE *BITTERLUCK*.

BIG AND FAST AND ***MEAN***.

LOOK AT THE TWO OF THEM.

HE DIDN'T EVEN ASK FOR MY ADVICE.

SHE'S NOT *REAL*. SHE'S A COLLECTION OF *DATA*.

HE *CREATED* HER FROM A MEMORY.

BUT I'M *HERE*. I'M *NOW*.

I'M THE ROIYA SINTOR WHO STOOD BY HIM IN COMBAT; WHO *WORRIED* ABOUT HIM; WHO *NURSED* HIM WHEN HE WAS WOUNDED.

HOW COULD HE JUST *REPLACE* OUR FRIENDSHIP WITH A DIGITAL *GHOST?*

YOU ARE *NOT* THE ROIYA I KNOW.

I DO NOT KNOW *WHAT* YOU ARE.

I---

SAM, DARLING?

I'M LISTENING, ZANNI.

THREE OBJECTS MOVING *FAST*, HEADED FOR YOUR LOCATION.

I'M PATCHING THE SCAN THROUGH TO ROIYA.

I *SEE* THEM, ZANNI.

TOO *SMALL* TO BE SHIPS.

BUT THEY'RE DEFINITELY MOVING WITH *INTENT*.

HEADS UP!

UNNH!

OOP.

TOO LATE.

SOME KIND OF BIO-MECHANICAL *HYBRID.*

PART MACHINE-- PART *SOME-THING* ELSE.

UNNGH

HUNH

BITTERLUCK! BRACE FOR *IMPACT,* CREW!

THAT'S--

=HUNGH!=

--FASCINATING, ROIYA!

I'VE HAD--

--ENOUGH!

ARE THERE ANY *MORE* OF THESE THINGS, ROIYA?

IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY AND I HAVEN'T HAD *LUNCH* YET.

SHIELDS ARE OFF-LINE FOR REPAIRS!
THAT THING'S GONNA PUNCTURE OUR PRESSURE SEAL!
I'M AWARE OF THAT, JONS!
I'M GONNA PUT ON A SUIT AND CLIMB OUT AFTER THAT--
THERE'S A BETTER WAY!
IF WE DEPRESSURIZE THIS CLOSE TO A GRAVITY WELL--
EVERYBODY SHUT UP!
WE'RE NOT DEFENSELESS.
Oh?

SLOW DOWN, WILL YOU? LET ME MODULATE THE TRANSLATOR.

THIEVES? YOU *OWN* THIS JUNK?

THIEVES! CRIMINALS!

OF *COURSE* I OWN IT! ALL OF THESE WRECKS ARE *MINE!* I HAVE *AUTHORIZATION!*

A LEASE TO THIS ANOMALY AND A *QUADRANT* OF SURROUNDING SPACE *GRANTED* BY THE OGMALAN DIRECTORATE.

WE'RE *NEW* TO THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.

I'M SURE WE CAN COME TO *SOME* KIND OF DEAL.

⇒HUNH!⇐

Oh, I AM *CERTAIN* WE CAN.

PLATINUM? EIKIDIUM? QU-QUADI CRYSTALS?

NOTHING *LIKE* THAT. SOMETHING BETTER.

BETTER?

RUN A SPECTRO-ANALYSIS OF MY SHIP'S *HULL*.

CORONA OF S'TH THALIS.

DENSITY **OFF** THE OADA SCALE.

MOLECULAR STRUCTURE **UNKNOWN**.

TEN QUADIKS OF THIS MATERIAL AND YOU MAY TAKE WHAT YOU **LIKE**.

ONE.

SEVEN.

TWO.

FIVE.

THREE.

XXX

VERY WELL.

HURF HURF HURF!

AREN'T YOU *WORRIED*, SAM?

ABOUT?

YOU *GAVE AWAY* A LOT OF THAT TRENIN STUFF.

IT MIGHT BE *DANGEROUS* IN THE HANDS OF THAT LITTLE BANDIT.

IT'S TOUGH STUFF, ALL RIGHT.

SO TOUGH HE'LL BREAK EVERY TOOL HE *HAS* TRYING TO WORK IT, ROIYA.

LET'S GET BACK TO *WORK*.

I COULD HAVE STRUCK A BETTER DEAL BUT HE DIDN'T EVEN ASK MY ADVICE.

NO, IT'S *"DIGI-ROIYA THIS AND DIGI-ROIYA THAT."*

NO ONE'S LISTENING TO YOU.

DOES SHE CHECK OUT?

EVERYTHING IS ON-LINE AND RUNNING TO ***MAX*** EFFICIENCY.

POWER HER UP TO ***ORBIT*** THIS COLLAPSAR ONE TIME.

WE'LL USE IT TO ***SLINGSHOT*** TO OPTIMUM SPEED.

LET'S SEE WHAT THE ***NEW*** *BITTERLUCK* CAN DO.

AS YOU ***ORDERED,*** SKIPPER.

BITTERLUCK ***AWAY*** AND BOUND FOR ***GAIA.***

"GAIA. IT SEEMS SO LONG SINCE WE'VE BEEN *HOME*."

SAMANDAHL REY?

YEAH, I'VE *HEARD* OF HIM, LADY.

AND YOU WANT TO *TALK* TO HIM.

IT'S *URGENT*.

HE'S *SUPPOSED* TO BE HEADING BACK HERE FROM AN EXTENDED COMBAT TOUR.

DOES HE *KNOW* YOU?

NO.

BUT IT'S OF *VITAL* IMPORTANCE THAT WE MEET.

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SULTAN RONOLO?

WHERE--

HAVE WE REACHED A *DESTINATION?*

NO. WE STILL TRAVEL AT SPEED FROM GALACTIC CENTER.

NO SIGN AS *YET* OF A HABITABLE PLANET OR ANY SORT OF CIVILIZATION.

THEN *WHY* AM I AWAKENED FROM CRYO-SLEEP, GENERAL HRAD?

YOU *KNOW* I CAN'T SIMPLY HIBERNATE LIKE YOU SAURIANS.

THE JOURNEY IS HARD ON *US* AS WELL, RONOLO. THAT IS WHY WE *THAWED* YOU OUT.

THE SKELETON CREW THAT REMAINS AWAKE REQUIRES FEEDING.

NO!

BUT YOU *ASSURED* ME, HRAD. THERE WERE ENOUGH SUPPLIES ON THIS SHIP FOR A *CENTURY.*

WE HAD *ENOUGH* TO EAT.

IT'S MORE A MATTER OF *TASTE.*

YOU-- *CAN'T.*

YOU'RE A MAN OF REFINED APPETITES. YOU UNDERSTAND.

BESIDES, NOW THAT WE ARE FUGITIVES FROM *BOTH* THE HUMAN UNION AND MY OWN RACE-- YOU ARE--

I AM *WHAT* EXACTLY?

WHAT?

FIND HIM!

KILL HIM!

CUT HIM *OFF* FROM THE ESCAPE UNITS. HE *MUST* NOT LEAVE THE SHIP.

THE HUMAN HAS LONG *OUTLIVED* HIS USEFULNESS TO US--

--EXCEPT AS *SUSTENANCE.*

I WANT A HEAT SCAN OF THE *ENTIRE* SHIP. WE MUST *LOCATE* THE HUMAN AND--

GENERAL HRAD, THERE IS AN OBJECT *APPROACHING* US.

OUT *HERE?* A BIT OF *DEBRIS* OR--

IT *FOLLOWS* US.

AND IS *GAINING.*

IMPOSSIBLE. WE TRAVEL AT .99 LIGHT SPEED.

NO *SHIP* COULD NEAR US SO--

EYE OF THE PROPHET--

"--SAMANDAHL REY."

HE MUST BE *DESTROYED.*

HOW CAN HE FLY THROUGH EMPTY *SPACE?*

NO *TIME* FOR QUESTIONS!

FIRING REAR *BATTERIES!* FULL *POWER!*

LAUNCHING *MISSILES* THREE THROUGH SEVEN!

THIS IS GENERAL HRAD!

ALL CREW TO BATTLE STATIONS!

HA!

NOTHING COULD SURVIVE THAT.

NOT EVEN A *WARFLEET.*

THE OBJECT STILL GAINS!

A FALSE READING FROM--

--RADIATION.

YOU *SUMMONED* US, GENERAL?

THE SHIP IS UNDER *ATTACK*.

FROM *WHAT?*

QUADRONS... TWO...

ONE.

HOW *SOON* UNTIL IMPACT?

RIGHT--

THOOM

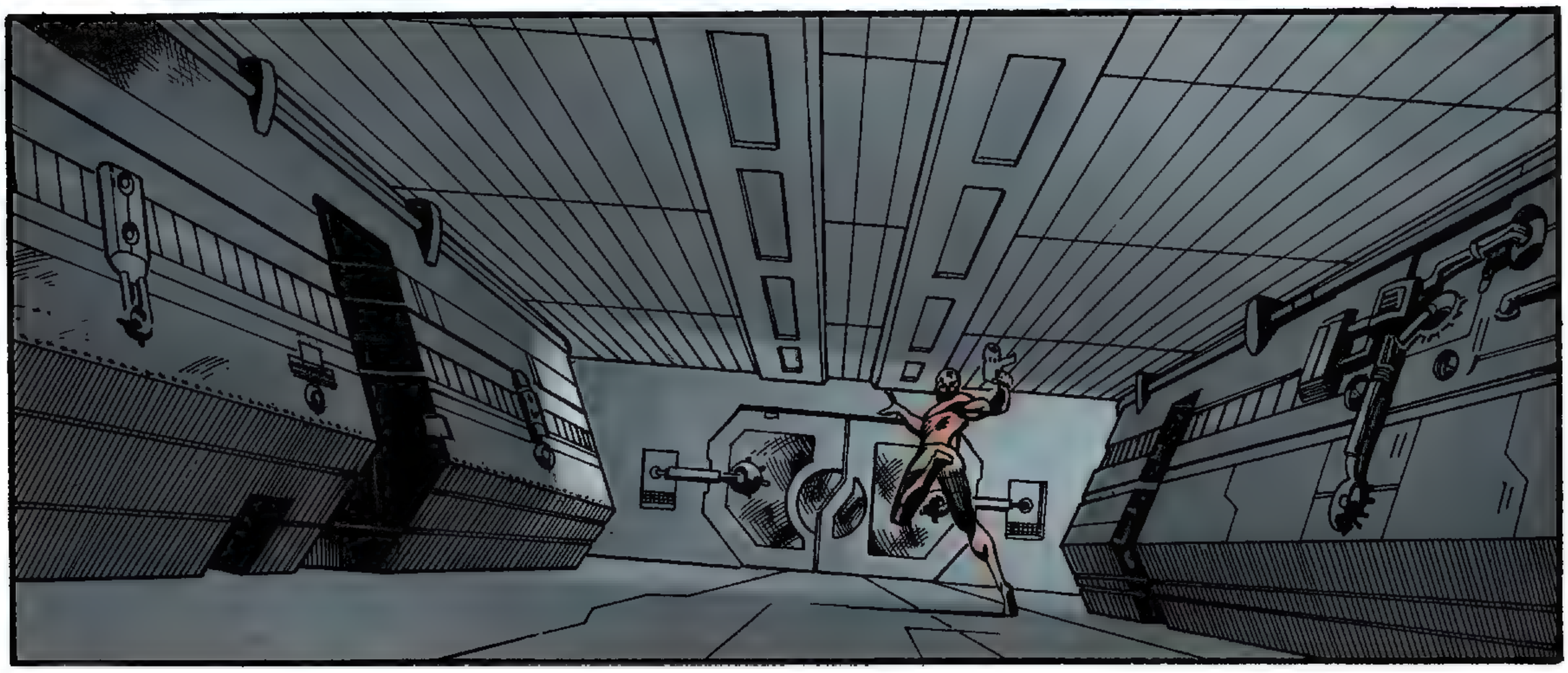
NOW.

THOOM THOOM

BOOM

TIK TIK TIK

NO...



HE IS NEARLY *THROUGH* THE HULL!

GET INTO *PRESSURE* SUITS AND--

IT IS *YOU* HE WANTS, GENERAL.

WHY SHOULD *ALL* OF US DIE?

YOU WOULD *BETRAY* ME?

YOU MUDSUCKING--

PROTECT ME, YOUR MOST FAITHFUL OF SERVANTS I DID WHAT I DID ONLY TO GLORIFY YOU--

Oh!

IT WAS *HRAD'S* PLAN! I HAD NO *WAY* OF KNOWING HE WOULD USE THE WEAPON AGAINST *GAIA!*

YOU *CANNOT* BELIEVE ZANNI! SHE *HATES* ME! SHE *LIES!*

SPARE ME!

MUST ESCAPE--ONLY HOPE--

TRAJECTORY OR DESTINATION?

ANYWHERE! AWAY FROM HERE!

REY-- I DO NOT *FEAR* YOU--

A GENERAL OF THE →KOFF← TYRANNIAN GUARD IS NOT AFRAID--

NO FEAR--

NO WEAKNESS--

I WILL NOT COWER--

EVEN BEFORE *YOU*--

I'M *GLAD* I OBLITERATED YOUR PLANET!

I WOULD DO IT AGAIN!

I ONLY WISH--

--IT HAD KILLED MORE--

--THAT IT HAD NOT STOPPED--

--UNTIL EVERY HUMAN IN-- UNIVERSE--

--DEAD--

ROIYA?

I *KNOW* YOU'RE NOT ASLEEP.

YOU *DON'T* SLEEP, RIGHT?

RIGHT, SAM. JUST *CONCENTRATING* ON A PROGRAM.

OF *ME?*

WHAT TOOK *THAT* KIND OF CONCENTRATION? YOU WHIP THESE DISPLAY IMAGES UP ALL THE TIME.

I WAS *BROADCASTING* IT THROUGH SUB-SPACE.

ANYWHERE IN *PARTICULAR?*

X-567890 OR THEREABOUTS.

GALACTIC NORTH? WAY OUT PAST THE GHLAIAN WEB.

WAY PAST.

ANY *REASON* FOR ALL THAT EFFORT?

JUST TAKING CARE OF A FEW LOOSE *ENDS.*

"NOTHING TO *WORRY* ABOUT."

AIR QUALITY BELOW MINIMUM STANDARD.

AFTER TWENTY DAYS--

--WHO IS *SURPRISED?*

STILL NO TRANSMISSIONS--SIGNS OF LIFE.

BROAD SPECTRUM SCAN NEGATIVE FOR 2.3 MILLION QUADRANTS.

CHANCE OF ENCOUNTERING SPACE-TRAVELING SENTIENTS BEFORE LIFE SUPPORT FAILURE--

DON'T *TELL* ME.

ALERT! ALERT!

I TOLD YOU *NOT* TO TELL ME.

HYDRO-DRIVE ENGINE DETECTED.

A *SHIP?*

MAKING DELIBERATE COURSE CHANGE TO INTERCEPT.

HOW *CLOSE?*

TIME TO INTERCEPT: ONE HOUR.

YOUR SERVANT *PRAISES* YOU--

--I AM *DEDICATED* TO GOOD DEEDS FOR ALL OF MY DAYS.

WHAT*EVER* FATE AWAITS ME I GO GLADLY--

SAURIAN *OR* HUMAN, I WILL ACCEPT THEIR JUDGMENT--

--BETTER *THAT* THAN TO DIE UNKNOWN AND UNREMEMBERED IN THE VOID--

THANK YOU, MY FRIENDS!

BLESSINGS *UPON* YOU FOR--

Uh?

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YEAR TEN OF THE GHLANKA CAMPAIGN IN THE HUMAN-SAURIAN WAR.

DO NOT *SHOOT*, HUMAN!

WE HAVE *WOUNDED!*

I'LL TAKE CARE OF THEM FOR YOU.

UNNH!

I'LL TAKE CARE OF ALL OF YOU.

GUNH!

GAAH!

VEGA!

THEY WERE *SURRENDERING!*

THEY WERE *LIZARDS,* SERGEANT REY.

YOU GONNA RANK ME FOR A BUNCH OF *SCALEBACKS?*

YOU'RE NO LONGER ON *POINT,* VEGA.

JOIN THE *REST* OF THE UNIT AND KEEP THAT WEAPON *SECURED.*

YES, SERGEANT.

YOU HAVE TO CUT VEGA SOME *LEEWAY,* SAM.

AND WHY IS *THAT,* ROIYA? WE'VE *ALL* LOST FRIENDS.

LIZARDS KILLED HIS WHOLE *FAMILY* ON AZIMOR COLONY.

THAT DOESN'T EXCUSE *SLAUGHTER,* TROOP.

VEGA SENT ME *FORWARD,* SERGEANT!

YOU'RE WALKING *POINT,* TAQUIT.

KEEP YOUR EYES *OPEN* AND YOUR TRIGGER FINGER *FROSTY.*

WE HAVE *HUMAN* NON-COMBATANTS IN THIS AREA--

--AND WE DON'T WANT TO WASTE ANY OF OUR *OWN.*

LIFE SIGNALS ARE *FAINT*. COULD BE *ANY*THING.

VERMIN OR A HOUND PACK.

COMMAND SAID THEY RECEIVED *WAVE* SIGNALS FROM THIS AREA.

HUMAN VOICES, ROIYA.

COULD BE *BACKGROUND* NOISE. COULD BE A *SNIPE* HUNT.

REMEMBER ON RETIEF STATION WHEN THE LIZARDS *LURED* US IN WITH OLD TRANSMISSIONS?

MAKES YOU WONDER WHY WE KEEP *DOING* THIS.

YOU *STAYING* WHEN YOUR CYCLE IS UP, SAM?

YOU COULD BE AN *OFFICER* WITH ALL THIS COMBAT TIME.

ME? *I'M* NO LEADER. I WOULDN'T BE TOPPING *THIS* UNIT IF CAPTAIN STRONG HADN'T BOUGHT IT.

I'M CYCLING OUT AND LEADING A LIFE WHERE *NO ONE* RELIES ON SAMANDAHL REY.

SERGEANT! I HAVE A *VISUAL!*

WHY CAN'T YOU JUST SAY YOU *SEE* SOMETHING?

ONE HUMAN SIGHTED.
FEMALE. JUVENILE.
STAY RIGHT THERE, KID!
WHERE'S YOUR *PARENTS?*
HOLD IT!
STAND *DOWN!*
BUNCH OF *GOMERS* WITH GUNS.
EVER THINK YOU'D *SPOOK* HER?
SORRY, SARGE.
GOT A HOT *READ* ON HER, SAM.

YOUR *STAR-SENS* LENS WORKING, ROIYA?

BROKE MINE ON CLASTUR V.

ME, *TOO*. WE'LL TRY *SQUINTING*.

SAM.

I *SEE* HER.

YOU'RE *SAFE* NOW, HONEY.

IS YOUR *FAMILY* AROUND?

CAN YOU LEND A HAND HERE, ROIYA?

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TALK TO KIDS.

SAM...

...I SMELL *LIZARD* STINK.

WEAPONS DOWN. *PRISONERS* I WANT.

DAMN.

MORE LIKE A *MEAL* HE WANTS.

SMART FOR A HUMAN.

THIS ONE TOO *SMALL* TO--

UH?

SORRY, SERGEANT REY.

SHOULD'VE WAITED FOR AUTHORIZATION, RIGHT?

VEGA...

YOU GET A PASS *THIS* TIME, TROOP.

BY THE WAY-- GOOD *SHOT.*

SEEMS LIKE YOU NEEDED A *HAND.*

CAN YOU TELL US WHERE THE *OTHER* PEOPLE ARE?

SHE'S NOT *TALKING*, SAM.

CAN YOU *SHOW* US?

GOOD GIRL.

SAURIAN *STRAGGLERS* IN THE AREA.

STAY *SHARP*.

LIFE SIGNALS GETTING *HOTTER*, SAM.

ANYONE WITH *STAR-SENS* ARRAY *FUNCTIONAL*?

I SEE *FIGURES*. HUMAN PROFILE. APPROACHING FROM THE *INTERIOR*.

DEEDRE!

MUH-MUH!

UNIT, STAND *DOWN*.

I THOUGHT I'D--I'D--

WE *HAVE* SURVIVORS.

PREPARE FOR *EVAC.*

UNIT YALE TO COMMAND, WE NEED ***TRANSPORT*** FOR--

--HOW ***MANY,*** SAM?

HOW ***MANY*** ARE YOU?

ABOUT ***FIFTY.***

SOME WILL NEED TO BE ***CARRIED.***

WE HAVE ***WOUNDED*** AND ELDERLY AND A FEW INFANTS.

WE'VE BEEN HIDING HERE FOR ***WEEKS*** SINCE THE FIRST ATTACK.

WE'LL GET THEM ***MEDICAL*** ATTENTION SO THEY CAN BE LIFTED.

ARE WE ***WINNING?***

WE TOOK OUT THE LIZARD ***INVASION*** FLEET.

NOW WE'RE HUNTING THEIR ***INFANTRY*** ON THE GROUND.

BUT, ***ARE*** WE WINNING?

IT'S-- HARD TO *SAY.*

HOW DID YOU *ESCAPE* THE SCALEBACKS?

KNOWING WHERE TO *HIDE.* FORAGING AT *NIGHT.*

LIVING LIKE *PESTS* FOR THE MOST PART.

AND *KILLING* OUR SHARE OF LIZARDS.

RIKKI HERE NAILED AT LEAST *SEVEN* OF THEM.

EIGHT, SIR.

GOT A SNAKEFACE THIS *MORNING.*

WELL, START PACKING UP AND WE'LL *MOVE* YOU OFF-WORLD.

OFF-WORLD?

GHLANKA'S A *WASH.* WE'RE EVACING *ALL* SURVIVORS.

THEN TAKING OUT THE LIZARDS FROM SPACE.

SERGEANT? DANZIG HERE.

TRANSPORT'S HERE.

GO AHEAD.

GET THE *DROP AREA* SQUARED. WE'RE ON OUR *WAY.*

WE'RE *MOVING,* PEOPLE!

ESSENTIALS *ONLY!*

ABLE BODIES WILL *HELP* WITH THE WOUNDED!

"WE'RE *SPACEBOUND* INSIDE OF FIVE MINUTES!"

LANDING AREA CLEAR?

CLEAR TO HOVER. DROP YOUR RAMP TO TAKE ON PASSENGERS.

ROTATING FOR POSITION.

HUNT COVER!

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE *DROP* AREA, TROOP?

THEY TOOK DOWN THE *HEAVY*, SERGEANT!

ANY CLUE TO *ORDNANCE?*

GROUND LAUNCHED! CAME FROM THE *SOUTH-EAST!*

THAT MEANS WE HAVE *LIZARDS* ON THE GROUND *AND* IN RANGE!

EVERYONE WITH A *WEAPON* TO THE PERIMETER!

THEY'RE **COMING,** SAM.

RAPTOR CAVALRY!

TAKE DOWN THEIR *MOUNTS!*

WATCH THE *FLANKS!* THE RAPTOR RIDERS ARE *SKIRMISHERS!*

THEY'LL BE SCREENING FOR *INFANTRY!*

KEEP YOUR BEAD *LOW!* DON'T FIRE UNTIL YOU HAVE A *TARGET!*

SUPPRESSION FIRE WON'T *DO!*

SCALEBACKS ONLY RESPECT *KILL* SHOTS!

YAAAH!

UNNH!

SAM!

SINTOR! THESE LIZARDS ARE GRENADIERS!

UH?

SCOUTS FOR MECHANIZED ARMOR!

WE GOT NOTHING THAT'LL *DENT* THAT MONSTER.

OH, SAM--

UH!

=GUNH=

SCREEEE

HUNGRY?

CHEW ON--

=UNNH=

--THIS!

FAP

SAM! I THOUGHT YOU WERE--

GET US SOME HELP, ROIYA!

ON IT.

UNIT YALE TO ORBITAL COMMAND. REQUEST SUPPORT.

GREEN NINE OVER YOUR SIGNAL, UNIT YALE.

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?

TRACK MY TRANSMIT, GREEN. I'LL MARK THE TARGET AREA.

THIS CLOSE WORK, YALE?

RAZOR CLOSE, GREEN.

MARKING WITH PHASER SIGNATURE NOW.

READING CLEAR, GREEN?

BRILLIANT.

YOU SOUND CUTE, YALE. WHAT'RE YOU DOING AFTER THE WAR?

NOTHING THAT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH SPACECASE PILOTS.

YOUR LOSS, GORGEOUS.

THAT'S *ENOUGH*, VEGA. THEY'RE *BEAT*.

SCALEBACKS AREN'T BEAT UNTIL THEY'RE ALL *DEAD*.

ONE *MORE* WON'T MATTER. LET HIM *GO*.

THAT'S NOT HOW *THEY* FIGHT, REY.

WE'RE NOT *SUPPOSED* TO FIGHT LIKE THEY DO. WE'RE *HUMAN*, REMEMBER?

TELL THAT TO *HIM.*

ORBITAL COMMAND HAS NO TRANSPORTS TO SPARE. LOOKS LIKE WE'RE WALKING OUT OF HERE!

GROUNDBASE VANCADDA IS *TEN* SECTORS NORTH! PICK UP YOUR GEAR AND *MOVE!*

LOOKS LIKE WE GET TO *WALK* AWAY AGAIN, SAM.

SOME OF US, ROIYA.

BUT I HAVE THIS FEELING I'M NOT WALKING *AWAY* FROM ANYTHING.

"MORE LIKE THE WORST IS *AHEAD* OF ME."

RETRIEVE HIM! BRING HIM TO THE *CRAWLER!*

HIS WOUNDS ARE *SEVERE*. HE WILL NOT LIVE *ANYWAY*.

HE *MUST* LIVE! DO YOU NOT *RECOGNIZE* HIM?

JUST ANOTHER *OFFICER*, I'D SAY.

MORE THAN THAT--

--IT IS *LORD TCHLUSARUD*, SON OF THE *MATRIARCH!*

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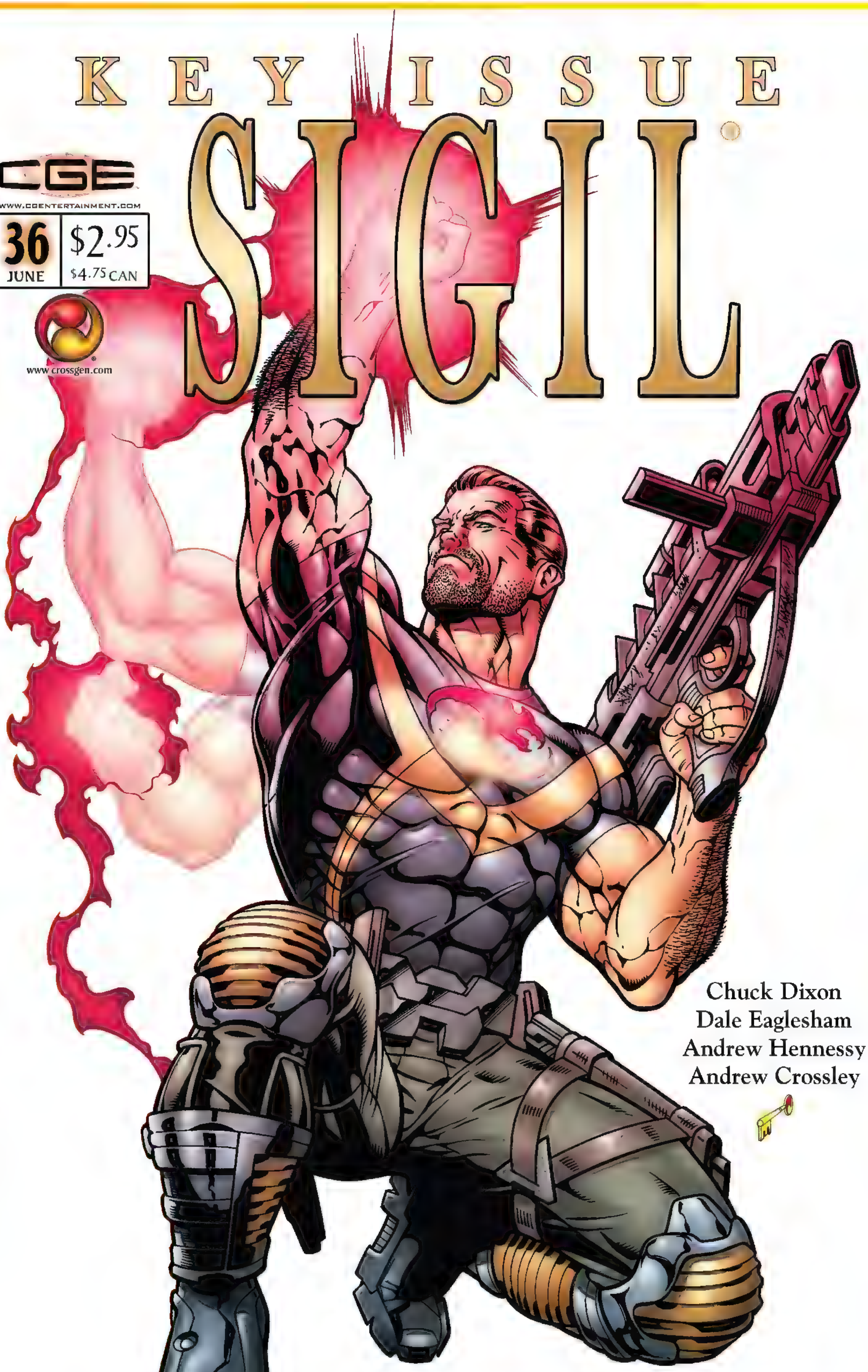

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GET IN HERE!

HUH?

→YAWN←

MY SHIFT DOESN'T *START* FOR TWO ROTATIONS.

IT STARTS NOW. I NEED A SECOND OPINION.

OKAY. YOU'RE RUDE *AND* YOU'RE STUPID.

I HAVE *MULTIPLE* OBJECTS HEADING ON A TRAJECTORY FOR POP CENTRAL AT LIGHT POINT NINE.

ROCKS?

SHIPS.

SAURIAN?

THEY'RE *COMING* FROM LIZARD SPACE, BUT THEY DON'T FIT THE PROFILES.

ARE THOSE *PARAMETERS* RIGHT?

YEAH. THE SHIPS ARE THREE *MEGRANS* ACROSS.

BRUNDLE STATION TO MIL-PAC COM CENTER!

SUB SPACE TRANSMISSION RECEIVED. WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU, BRUNDLE?

WE HAVE A *FLEET* LEAVING SAURIAN SPACE!

WE'RE *RIGHT* IN THEIR PATH.

ARE THEY--

THEY'RE ACTIVATING A *WEAPON.*

"AND THAT'S WHEN WE LOST *CONTACT,* SIR."

"COULD THIS BE A *CELESTIAL* ANOMALY, BREVET?"

THE ASTEROID BELT FORMERLY CALLED GAIA.

NO, ADMIRAL. WE RECEIVED A *PARTIAL* RELAY OF BRUNDLE'S SCAN.

AND IT'S A *SHIP?*

AN *ARMADA,* SIR.

WE THOUGHT WE HAD A FEW CYCLES RELIEF FROM THE SAURIANS.

THE SCAN DOESN'T FIT WITHIN SAURIAN TECH STANDARDS, SIR.

I *HATE* RIDDLES, BREVET. DO WE *HAVE* A MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE AREA?

YES, ADMIRAL. THEY'RE WITHIN A *JUMP* FROM THE UNKNOWN FLEET'S *ORIGIN* POINT.

WHICH SHIP OF *OURS* WOULD BE *THAT* FAR OUT IN THE BOONDOCKS?

"THE *BITTERLUCK*, SIR."

DEEP SPACE: GALACTIC NORTH 5-6

SOMETHING *URGENT* COMING OVER THE PRIORITY SUB-SPACE BOX, ROIYA.

WHAT'S IT *SAY*, JeMERIK?

BUT IT'S FOR *SAM*.

LIKE YOU DON'T KNOW *ALL* ABOUT IT, JeMERIK.

NOTHING I CARE TO SHARE WITH *YOU* AT THE MOMENT.

KNOW EVERYTHING AND *SAY* NOTHING. THAT'S YOU ALL *OVER*.

YOU'D BEST TROT ALONG, ROIYA. SAM NEEDS TO RESPOND.

CAN YOU READ MY MIND?

YES. AND YOU SHOULD BE *ASHAMED* OF YOURSELF.

JERK.

Uh... SAM?

I REALLY *HATE* TO DO THIS, YOU TWO. BUT WE HAVE A PRIORITY FROM MILPAC/UMPALA.

THERE *BETTER* BE A WHOLE *PLANET* IN TROUBLE, ROIYA.

SORRY, ZANNI. *REALLY.*

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

WE GET A *FEW* DAYS DOWNTIME WHILE WE REACH UNION SPACE AND--

WHY *ARE* THEY CALLING US WAY OUT *HERE?* WE'RE NOWHERE *NEAR* A HUMAN SYSTEM.

IT WAS CODED FOR *YOU,* SAM.

WHICH MEANS JeMERIK ALREADY *READ* IT, RIGHT?

Oh... *HI,* SAM.

HE JUST *WALKS* BY. IT'S LIKE I DON'T *EXIST,* JONS.

LIKE THE *HOLOGRAM* OF ME IS MORE *REAL* TO HIM.

WHAT D'*YOU* CARE?

HOW WOULD *YOU* FEEL IF YOU WOKE UP AND FOUND OUT AN *ELECTRONIC* VERSION OF YOU HAD TAKEN YOUR PLACE?

I'D KICK BACK AND LET *HIM* DO THE WORK.

I WAS *DEAD* TO HIM.

THE HOLO-ROIYA *IS* ME NOW.

THEY SHARED EXPERIENCES THAT CHANGED SAM'S *LIFE.*

I'M NOT A *PART* OF THAT. I CAN'T *BE* THAT FOR HIM.

Aw, STOP FEELIN' *SORRY* FOR YOURSELF, ROIYA.

YOU GOT *ME.*

WHAT?

WHAT WAS *THAT* FOR?

FIGURE IT *OUT,* TOUGH GUY.

OW!

THE *THRITH* SYSTEM, ADMIRAL? THAT'S A DARK QUADRANT.

I SHOULD KNOW. THAT'S WHERE THE SAURIAN ***SUN-DAMPENER*** WAS DETONATED.

IT'S JUST A GROUP OF ***ICEBALLS*** CIRCLING A COLD STAR.

*THAT'S THE **SOURCE** OF THIS INCURSION--*

*--WHETHER IT MAKES SENSE OR **NOT**.*

THERE'S NO ***WAY*** WE CAN CATCH UP WITH THE UNIDENTIFIED VESSELS.

WE'LL *INTERCEPT THEM WITH A FORCE FROM ONE OF THE OUTER RING COMMANDS.*

*I NEED **YOU** TO RECON THE THRITH SYSTEM TO SEE WHERE THEY **CAME** FROM.*

WILL *DO*, ADMIRAL.

SET COURSE FOR T-5-SPG.9887623 Q.R.

THE MOST ***DIRECT*** ROUTE TAKES US THROUGH THE ***HEART*** OF LIZARD SPACE.

DAMN SHAME--

"--WE WON'T HAVE TIME TO *STOP* AND SAY *'HELLO'* TO LOSER."

TCHARUN: HOMEWORLD OF THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

THE CROWDS *SEEM* HAPPY ENOUGH, LORD TCHLUSARUD.

THEY ARE PLEASED THAT THEY DID NOT *SHARE* THE FATE OF THE CITY S'RHNNA.

THAT DEN OF TRAITORS IS A RADIOACTIVE POOL. *T'SLIBIAH* WILL SERVE AS MY CAPITAL NOW.

WHAT WILL SUCH AS YOU AND I *DO* IN THIS NEW ERA OF *PEACE*, KCHASKCHA?

AN *UNEASY* PEACE, GENERAL HCKABBA. I PRAY TCHLUSARUD HAS THE HEART TO *MAINTAIN* HIS HOLD.

MURDERER!

THE BLOOD OF S'RHNNA DRIES ON YOUR SCALES!

COME *HERE*, YOU!

TCHLUSARUD HAS *STOLEN* THE THRONE!

FOOL!

RISE UP! BRING DOWN THE PRETENDER!

HOLD THERE! DO *NOT* KILL HIM!

YOUR REIGN IS *ILLEGITIMATE!*

I TAKE THE PLACE OF MY MOTHER.

YOUR SOLDIERS MAY *SLAY* ME, BUT THAT WILL *NOT* CHANGE YOUR FATE, *KILLER!*

WHAT SORT OF MONARCH DO YOU *IMAGINE* ME TO BE?

MY SOLDIERS WILL *NOT* KILL YOU, SUBJECT.

I RESERVE THAT RIGHT FOR *MYSELF.*

DO YOU *STILL* DOUBT HIS HEART?

HE WILL RULE *WELL,* GENERAL.

"I SEE DAYS OF SWEET *GLORY* AHEAD."

SAM, WE'RE ON THE OUTER RIM OF THE *THRITH* SYSTEM.

BUT IT'S NOT WHAT YOU *DESCRIBED*.

YOU SAID IT WAS A *DEAD* SYSTEM.

THIS *CAN'T* BE THE SAME QUADRANT.

THE SAURIAN STAR WEAPON SUCKED THE *HEAT* FROM THE ENTIRE SYSTEM.

IT WAS LEFT *LIFELESS* AND *FROZEN*.

IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN *REBUILT* BY THE SAURIANS IN SO SHORT A TIME.

IT'S *NOT* SAURIANS. THEY COULDN'T *LIVE* UNDER THESE CONDITIONS.

THESE PLANETS ARE *BATHED* IN COSMIC RADIATION. THERE'S *NO* ATMOSPHERE. *NO* HEAT.

THEN *WHO* ARE THEY AND WHAT ARE THEY USING FOR *ENERGY?*

THE NEGATION.

IS THAT *WHO* THEY ARE OR WHAT THEY USE FOR *POWER?*

BOTH.

JeMERIK'S *RIGHT.*

THE WHOLE SYSTEM'S GIVING OFF AN ENERGY SIGNATURE I'VE NEVER *SEEN* BEFORE.

I DON'T *NEED* YOUR GUESSING GAMES RIGHT NOW.

SAM--

THIS IS WHAT IT'S ALL *ABOUT,* SAM.

THIS IS THE *REASON* FOR THE SIGIL.

THE REASON YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN THIS *POWER.*

TOO *VAGUE.* I NEED *DETAILS,* JeMERIK.

HAHAHA HAHA!

ROIYA?

IS *THAT* WHO I AM TO YOU?

OR AM I A *MEMORY?* A *CORPSE?*

THAT DARK ENERGY-- SHE'S *GLOWING* WITH IT.

WHY WOULD ROIYA--

THAT'S *NOT* ROIYA, SAM. IT NEVER *WAS.*

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN. BUT THIS IS MY *BLIND SPOT,* EVERYONE.

THAT THING IS *PURE* NEGATION.

WHAT DOES THAT *MEAN?*

IT MEANS THAT THIS IS THE *END,* SIGIL-BEARER.

THIS FOUL MASQUERADE IS *OVER*.

I AM FREE TO ROAM, AT *REAL* WEIGHT TO JUSTICE TO YOUR WORLD!

AND THE *GRANDEST* IRONY IS--THAT *YOU* BROUGHT ME HERE!

WHEN YOU BATTLED THE SAURIAN LORD--YOUR COMBINED ENERGIES OPENED A *RENT* IN SPACE.

A PORTAL THROUGH WHICH *MY* KIND COULD ENTER.

=UNNH!=

AND WHAT *BETTER* VESSEL TO GAIN YOUR CONFIDENCE THAN YOUR DEAR FRIEND *ROIYA*?

IT WAS THE GRANTING OF YOUR--

FONDEST WISH

SAM!

HE'S GONE, ZANNI.

GONE *WHERE*, JeMERIK? WHAT *WAS* THAT?

ANYBODY IN *CHARGE* HERE?

WE'VE GOT **SERIOUS** COMPANY ON THE WAY!

NO...

>UNNH<

>UH!<

THIS IS A *NIGHTMARE*-- IT *HAS* TO BE!

WE HAVE TO GO *AFTER* SAM.

WE CANNOT *FOLLOW* WHERE HE HAS GONE. THIS IS WHAT HE WAS *BORN* TO DO.

HE STANDS OR FALLS ON HIS OWN.

AND *IF* HE FALLS?

THEN IT'S VERY *SIMPLE*, ZANNI.

IT'S THE *END* OF *EVERY-THING*.

"AND THE *BEGINNING* OF SOMETHING DARK AND TERRIBLE."

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JULY

SIGIL

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WHAT DOES *THAT* MEAN, JEMERIK?

THEY ARE THE *NEGATION.*

SO, IT'S *NOT* SAURIANS CHASING US.

AND THEY'RE *NOT* HUMANS.

"THEY COME FROM A UNIVERSE *OPPOSED* TO THIS ONE.

"A REALITY OF *CHAOS* AND *DARKNESS*.

"THEY HAVE NO *PLACE* HERE. THEY SHOULD NOT *BE* HERE."

BUT THEY *ARE* HERE, JeMERIK, AND *ONE* OF THEM TOOK SAM!

ALL A *PART* OF THEIR STRATEGY, ZANNI.

I DID NOT *SEE* THIS. I AM *BLIND* TO THE NEGATION'S GRAND SCHEME.

"I DO NOT *KNOW* WHERE SAM IS."

UHHHH...

SAMANDAHL REY.

MILITARY COMMANDER OF THE PLANETARY UNION.

SIGIL-BEARER.

SO, YOU KNOW *ME*. WHAT DO THEY CALL *YOU* AT HOME?

I AM A *LAWBRINGER*.

I AM CALLED *XXTR*.

LAWBRINGER, huh? WHAT *LAW* DID I BREAK?

WHY BRING ME *HERE?*

YOU HAVE *VIOLATED* NEGATION SPACE.

I *BRING* YOU TO THIS VOID BECAUSE IT *REMOVES* YOU FROM ANY OUTSIDE SOURCE THAT MIGHT *POWER* YOUR SIGIL.

I'VE *STILL* GOT ENOUGH JUICE--

--TO SIT *YOU* DOWN, FREAK!

A PATHETIC DISPLAY.

QUITE POINTLESS.

I HOPE YOU'RE SATISFIED.

UH?

YOU ARE NOT IN YOUR WORLD.

THE LAWS YOU KNOW DO NOT APPLY.

REALITY IS WHAT I MAKE OF IT

YOU WILL SUBMIT TO EXAMINATION.

YOUR SIGIL IS OF NO *AVAIL*.

THERE IS *NAUGHT* HERE TO DRAW POWER FROM.

OR WEREN'T YOU *AWARE* OF HOW IT WORKED?

DID NO ONE TELL YOU IT COULD BE CIRCUMVENTED?

NO. .

YOUR FATE IS *MINE* TO DETERMINE.

JUST AS THE FATE OF YOUR *UNIVERSE* IS IN THE THRALL OF THE NEGATION.

THERE IS *LITTLE* YOUR CHOSEN WARRIORS CAN DO TO FORESTALL US.

"THE *END* IS INEVITABLE."

THEY'RE LEADING US INTO A ***BOX***. THAT PLANET-SIZED SHIP IS PULLING INTO OUR FLIGHTWAY.

JONS, ANY ***WIGGLE*** ROOM FOR AN EVASION MANEUVER?

FAST AS I KNOCK 'EM DOWN TWO ***MORE*** JUMP IN.

I DON'T KNOW WHO THESE GUYS ***ARE*** AND I HATE 'EM.

HOW CAN YOU BE BLIND TO AN ENTIRE ***UNIVERSE***, JeMERIK?

I AM NOT ***OMNIPOTENT***, ZANNI.

*ROIYA HERE. I HAVE A FEW QUESTIONS **MYSELF**, JeMERIK.*

*WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE **ARMOR** WE GOT FROM TRENIN?*

*IT'S **GOD**STUFF, ROIYA.*

*IMPERVIOUS TO NEARLY **ANY** KNOWN FORCE.*

*HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT. BECAUSE WE'RE GOING TO **STRESS** TEST IT IN A BIG WAY.*

EITHER IT'LL GET US OUT OF THIS MESS --

"--OR HAMMER ALL OF US TO *ATOMS*."

ADMIRAL DREGRZZI, THE UNIDENTIFIED CRAFT *NEARS* OUR DEFENSE PERIMETER.

CALL THE *FIGHTERS* OFF. WE'LL DEAL WITH THE ATTACKER *DIRECTLY*.

THEY MAKE *NO* ATTEMPT TO SLOW OR AVERT COLLISION.

I AM *AWARE* OF THAT, PHLENRI.

BUT THE IMPACT--

--WILL RESULT IN *ACCEPTABLE* DAMAGE AND CASUALTY LEVELS.

EMPOWER THE *WORLDHAMMER*. WE'LL TURN THIS RENEGADE TO *VAPOR*.

VRRGLE...

ENERGY DIVERSION TO *WORLDHAMMER*.

PREPARE FOR FIRING SEQUENCE.

FIRING SEQUENCE *INITIATED*.

"DO YOU *SEE* THE FOLLY OF RESISTANCE?"

YOU ARE BUT A *HUMAN*; MADE OF THE FRAGILE FLESH OF YOUR WORLD.

A SPECIES TOO WEAK TO HOLD ON TO ITS POSSESSIONS.

GAAAH!

WHUH-- WHY ARE YOU *DOING* THIS?

BECAUSE I *CAN*, SIGIL-BEARER.

YOU ARE A *CURIOSITY*.

I WOULD *KNOW* WHAT THIS POWER IS.

GYAAAAAAH!

TO STUDY ITS *EFFECT* ON YOUR PHYSIOGOMY.

TO SEE IF IT MIGHT BE *HARNESSED* TO SERVE THE NEGATION.

THIS SIGIL HAS *BURNED* ITSELF INTO YOUR DEEPEST BEING.

IT HAS DRAWN YOU *UP* AN EVOLUTIONARY LADDER.

YOU ARE *FAR* MORE THAN YOU WERE.

BUT *STILL* IT IS NOT ENOUGH.

WHUH— WHAT ELSE DO YOU *WANT* FROM ME?

=HUH=
=HUNH=

WHAT MORE DO YOU *HAVE?*

"THE *NUMBERS* ARE ALL HERE."

THE *MATH* WORKS.

NOT SURE ABOUT THE *PHYSICS*.

SO, STRAP *DOWN*.

WHAT *ABOUT* THE PHYSICS, ROIYA?

THE TRENIN ARMOR MAINTAINS A PROTECTIVE FIELD AROUND US.

I SENSE AN *"OR"* COMING.

OR YOU THREE ARE LIKE *BUGS* IN A JAR THAT'S HITTING A WALL AT LIGHT POINT EIGHT.

BUGJUICE.

BUT--

NO *TIME!* IT'S ALL OR *NOTHING!*

"THEY'RE *MAD*."

OR *WISE*. PERHAPS THEY SENSE THE FATE THAT AWAITS THOSE WE TAKE *ALIVE*.

OUR SPECTRO-SCANS HAVE NOT TOLD US *ENOUGH* ABOUT THE COMPOSITION OF THEIR SHIP OR *DRIVE* SYSTEM.

WHAT IS THERE TO *KNOW*? THEY WILL *DIE* IN A CLOUD OF PARTICLES WITHIN A MOMENT.

WENT THROUGH THAT JAMMER LIKE A ***BULLET!***

WHAT'D I *TELL* YOU?

YOU *TOLD* US WE ALL MIGHT DIE.

YEAH.

POOPERS.

TRENIN'S ARMOR *REMAINED* STABLE AND SHIELDED YOU GUYS FROM THE IMPACT FORCE.

AND LEFT THOSE *NEGATORS* BREATHING SPACE.

NOW ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS--

"--FIND SAM."

I WILL *KNOW* ALL.

YOU WILL *HELP* ME.

YOU WILL *BEG* TO HELP ME.

I HAVE A QUESTION FOR *YOU*--

FOR *ME*.

I CONFESS THAT I AM *INTRIGUED*.

IF THIS VOID IS SO *COMPLETE*--

--WHAT'S KEEPING *YOU* ALIVE?

HM?

COULD IT BE-- *THIS*?

YOU NEED A POWER SOURCE.

YOU NEED A WAY INTO AND OUT OF THIS PLACE.

I'M SENSING THAT *THIS* IS IT.

YOU DO NOT *COMPREHEND* WHAT YOU ARE-- DOING!

I KNOW IT'S ENOUGH TO PUT THE *STEEL* BACK IN ME.

AND I JUST MIGHT *VISIT* YOUR LITTLE UNIVERSE AND TEAR IT A NEW--

YOU *CANNOT!*

I *FORBID* YOU ENTRY!

Huh?

RETURN TO YOUR SPACE. WE SHALL *REJOIN* THIS INQUISITION ANOTHER TIME.

UNTIL *THEN*, SIGIL-BEARER.

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AUG

"A sci-fi epic...that rivals *Star Wars*!" — 411Mania.com

SIGIL

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Dale Eaglesham

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Andrew Crossley

IT IS GOOD.

TCHARUN: HOMEWORLD OF THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

CITIZENS OF T'SLIBIAH!

THE MATRIARCHY OF HOUSE M'RANAHNK IS ENDED!

THE RULE OF *TCHLUSARUD* BEGINS!

GIVE WELCOME TO THE THRONE OF THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY--

EMPEROR TCHLUSARUD!

THERE IS MUCH TO DO--

YOUR *GREATNESS*-- YOU WILL NOT *SPEAK* TO THE POPULACE?

THEY WOULD HEAR ONLY WHAT THEY *WISHED*.

THE TIME NOW IS TO *ACT*, NOT *TALK*.

BUT THE CITIZENS ARE YOUR *POLITICAL* CAPITAL..

I LEAVE POLITICS TO *YOU*, GR'BBT.

AND SHOULD I *FAIL* TO HOLD THE MOB'S TRUST?

THEN I SHALL FIND A *NEW* MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT.

=ULLP=

NOW, *TELL* ME ABOUT THE REMAINING POCKET OF REVOLT IN THE MARSH PROVINCES.

MINIMAL RESISTANCE, YOUR GREATNESS--

"--A MERE *ANNOYANCE* OR TWO."

SAM COULD BE *ANY*-WHERE WITHIN TEN QUADRANTS.

AND EVEN IF MY SCANNERS *WERE* ACCURATE OVER THAT AREA, WE'VE NO *HOPE* OF FINDING HIM AT THIS SPEED.

I DO NOT RELY ON YOUR TECHNICAL PROWESS, ROIYA.

RIGHT, JeMERIK. WE JUST GO ON ONE OF YOUR *FEELINGS*.

IT IS *MORE* THAN A FEELING.

SURE.

COULD WE *STOW* THE SNIPING?

NO ONE KNOWS IF SAM'S ALIVE OR *DEAD*.

HE IS *ALIVE*, ZANNI. THOUGH HE MAY WISH HE WERE *NOT*.

SLOW THE *BITTERLUCK* BY POINT NINE-NINE, ROIYA.

I HAVE A LIFEFORM ON THE FORWARD SCAN.

IS IT *SAM?*

YES, HE *LIVES*. BUT IN A SELF-INDUCED *STASIS*.

SAMANDAHL?

NO!

SAM, YOU'RE *SAFE*. YOU'RE WITH *US*.

IT'S *ME*. IT'S *ZANNI*.

ZANNI?

I--

WE *FOUND* YOU, SAM!

COULD WE BE *ALONE*, EVERYONE?

ROIYA TURNED INTO THAT-- *THING*.

I DIDN'T KNOW *WHERE* IT TOOK YOU.

IT WAS *ME*.

IT WAS *ME* WHO BROUGHT THE LAWBRINGER HERE.

"I'VE DONE A *TERRIBLE* THING, ZANNI."

OKAY, I'M *LOST*.

CAN *ANYONE* GET THIS OLD MARINE UP TO SPEED?

YOU AND ME BOTH, JONS.

SAM WAS TAKEN BY AN AGENT OF THE NEGATION CALLED A *LAWBRINGER*.

SOMEHOW A *RIFT* WAS OPENED. THE *NEGATION* IS NOW IN THIS UNIVERSE.

SO, THESE ARE PEOPLE YOU *KNOW*, JeMERIK?

LIKE *TRENIN* AND THAT CROWD?

THE NEGATION ARE *NOTHING* LIKE THE FIRST, ROIYA.

I'M NOT CERTAIN *WHAT* THEY ARE.

YOU KNOW *EVERYTHING*, JeMERIK.

EVERYTHING IN *THIS* UNIVERSE.

THE NEGATION IS A *DIFFERENT* UNIVERSE, POPULATED BY *WORLDS* OF BEINGS I KNOW *NOTHING* OF.

Huh?

THAT'S FREAKY.

HE'S *GONE*.

"AND I DON'T EVEN WANT TO *THINK* ABOUT WHAT MIGHT SCARE *HIM*."

BUT YOU CAN'T *BLAME* YOURSELF, SAM.

SO? DON'T TELL ME YOU MISS THAT JERK.

I THINK HE WAS *SCARED*, JONS.

IT WAS THE FINAL FIGHT WITH KHYRADON.

SOMEHOW THE ENERGY TORE A *HOLE* IN SPACE.

IT LET THEM *THROUGH*. YOU *SAW* THEIR TRAJECTORY.

THEY CAME FROM THE *THRITH* SYSTEM, WHERE I KILLED KHYRADON.

WHAT CAN WE *DO?* THEIR *FLEET* IS HEADING FOR POP CENTRAL AND GAIA.

I *UNDERSTAND* THAT. I UNDERSTAND THE DANGER.

WE CAN'T DO *ANYTHING* UNTIL WE KNOW MORE ABOUT THEM, ZANNI.

AND *YOU* CAN'T DO ANYTHING FEELING *SORRY* FOR YOURSELF, SAMANDAHL REY.

ZANNI--

--YOU DIDN'T *SEE* WHAT I SAW.

"I HOPE YOU NEVER *DO*."

TCHARZIZ: FOURTH PLANET OF THE D'RANTH SYSTEM WITHIN THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

THE UNIDENTIFIED ENERGY HAS ITS *SOURCE* HERE.

I SEE *NOTHING*, K'RTH.

PERHAPS YOUR INSTRUMENTS--

THE SIGNAL COMES FROM THE *CHASM* AHEAD.

I *SEE* IT. A *NATURAL* OCCURRENCE?

A SORT OF RADIATION. I CANNOT IDENTIFY--

FATHER OF STARS--

THAT WAS NOT *THERE* BEFORE.

THIS ZONE IS *RESTRICTED*. WHO COULD BE--

I KNOW NOT. BUT THIS MUCH IS *TRUE*--

--THOSE ARE *NOT* SAURIANS.

WE SHALL MARSHAL HERE ON THIS PLANE AND MOVE ON THE NEAREST SETTLEMENT.

A SPARSELY POPULATED WORLD. WE CAN USE IT TO *STAGE* OUR ASSAULT ON TCHARUN.

CONCERNING THESE *REPTILIANS?*

klik klik GENERAL SKUDEEDEN *klak* WHAT ORDERS?

"YOU NEED TO *ASK?*"

"THEY DIE AS *EASILY* AS HUMANS."

GAIA: CENTRAL WORLD OF THE PLANETARY UNION.

CAPRICIA?

STRANGE TO SEE YOU *HERE*.

WHO *ARE* YOU?

HOW DID YOU GET *IN* HERE?

I *APOLOGIZE* FOR YOUR IMPRISONMENT HERE. I NEVER *MEANT* THIS TO HAPPEN WHEN I SENT YOU HERE.

YOU DIDN'T SEND ME HERE.

SILLY ME. I FORGET THAT I APPEAR *DIFFERENTLY* HERE.

BUT I'M *STILL* DANIK.

ALL RIGHT, WHO AUTHORIZED *ENTRY* INTO PEN ZED-ULTRA?

THERE'S *BEEN* NO ENTRY.

EXPLAIN *HIM.*

THERE'S SO MUCH TO *DO,* CAPRICIA.

COME.

DEFENSE LEVEL *MEGA!* THIS ONE'S *TRICKY!*

WHEN THE HATCH OPENS, *COVER* THE ROOM.

THE PRISONER IS A SUSPECTED *SAURIAN* CONSTRUCT.

GO!

"WE FACE FORCES *BEYOND* OUR COMPREHENSION."

WHAT DO WE *KNOW* OF THIS ARMADA OF ALIEN SHIPS, UMPALA?

ONLY THAT THEY EMPLOY A LIGHT-PLUS CAPABLE DRIVE SYSTEM, MADAME PRESIDENT.

THEIR SHIPS ARE *PRESUMABLY* ARMED. AND THEIR MAIN VESSELS ARE TEN TIMES THE SIZE OF OUR LARGEST DESTROYERS.

THEIR *DESTINATION?*

THEIR *PROBABLE* TARGET POINT REMAINS UNION POP CENTRAL.

THEY ARE WITHIN A *WEEK* OF GAIA AND THE CENTER WORLDS.

WE'LL KNOW *NOTHING* OF THEIR STRENGTH OR INTENTIONS UNTIL THEY REACH THE RIM WORLDS.

MADAME PRESIDENT.

THEIR STRENGTH IS **INFINITE**. THEIR INTENTION IS TO INVADE AND **ENSLAVE** THE HUMAN RACE.

YOU'VE *ENCOUNTERED* THEM, COMMANDER REY.

I ORDER YOU *HOME* TO GAIA TO HELP IN THE DEFENSE OF UNION CENTRAL.

I'LL NEVER MAKE IT. THE INVASION FLEET WILL BE THERE LONG BEFORE I CAN SHOW UP BY ARC DRIVE.

I'M RETURNING TO THE THRITH SYSTEM TO STRIKE AT THEIR SOURCE.

THEN WE'RE ON OUR OWN AGAINST AN UNKNOWN FOE.

THAT'S THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT, MADAME PRESIDENT.

STRIKE THEM *HARD*, COMMANDER.

RATHER THAN OUR LAST *HOPE*--

--YOU MAY BE OUR FINAL *VENGEANCE* FOR A DEAD RACE...

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TCHARZIZ.
FOURTH PLANET OF THE D'RANTH SYSTEM WITHIN THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

WHERE *ARE* THEY, ZKKZX?

I CANNOT *KILL* THEM IF I CANNOT *FIND* THEM.

kklk THEY *CONCEAL* THEMSELVES, GENERAL SKUDEEDEN *kkck*

kklk THESE SAURIANS ARE *AMPHIBIOUS* kkck

kklk klik THEY DWELL *BENEATH* THE SURFACE OF THIS MARSH kkck

DESIGNED BY NATURE TO *ABSORB* THE IMPACT OF ANY ATTACK.

"THEN A *DIRECT* ASSAULT IS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

"WE WILL ENCOURAGE THEM TO *LEAVE* THE PROTECTION OF THEIR HOME--

"--WITH A HUNDRED OR SO *THERMAL* EMITTERS."

I RECALL *WORDS* FROM MY PAST--

--SOMETHING ABOUT BOILING A *FROG*.

XENO FORCE TO COMMAND-- RESISTANCE **ZERO**.

TARGETS ARE **DISORIENTED** AND IN NON-COMBATIVE STATE.

WHAT ARE OUR **ORDERS** CONCERNING PRISONERS, COMMAND?

HOLD, XENO. STAY FIRE UNLESS **PROVOKED**.

THESE SAURIANS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE *TOUGH.*

kklk WILL THIS BE A SUM TERMINATION MISSION, GENERAL? *kkck*

WEIGH THE *OPTIONS* FOR ME, ZKKZX.

kklk IF WE ARE TO USE THIS PLANET AS A STAGING AREA FOR ATTACKS ON THE SAURIAN HOMEWORLD--*kkck*

kklk--POPULATION'S BEST USE WOULD BE AS SLAVE LABOR *kkck*

MY THOUGHTS *PRECISELY,* ZKKZX.

COMMAND TO XENO--

"--TRANSPORT *AMBULATORY* SURVIVORS ONLY TO EQUATORIAL STAGING ZONE.

"THIS IS A *STANDING* OPERATIONAL ORDER UNTIL COUNTERMANDED.

"USE WHATEVER MEANS TO *MOTIVATE* POPULACE. WE NEED STRONG BACKS AND WEAK WILLS."

T'SLIBIAH. NEW CAPITAL OF TCHARUN. HOMEWORLD OF THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

LOST?

YOU HAVE *LOST* AN ENTIRE PLANET?

*LORD TCHLUSARUD, IT WAS AN **IMPOSSIBLE** TACTICAL SITUATION! WE WERE NOT **PREPARED**! WE HAD NO **WARNING**!*

*I HOLD **ONLY** THIS LAST **REFUGE** AT THE EDGE OF THE CH'CH'GGAH PLAIN!*

THE HUMAN MILITARY IS IN *DISARRAY!* HOW *COULD* THEY HAVE LAUNCHED SO LARGE AN ASSAULT ON TCHARZIZ?

*THE INVADERS ARE **NOT** HUMAN!*

WHAT?

THEY ARE MANY SPECIES, MERCIFUL TCHLUSARUD--MANY I HAVE NEVER SEEN!

THE SKIES DARKENED BY SHIPS! HORDES OF ARMORED TROOPS!

WHERE IS GENERAL KCHASKCHA?

HE HAS RETURNED TO THE V'KOON, MY EMPEROR.

AND HCKABBA?

DEALING WITH THAT INSURRECTION IN N'NEEVA, MY LIEGE.

I AM COMING TO TCHARZIZ.

YES, LORD.

YOU WILL HOLD UNTIL I ARRIVE.

AS YOU COMMAND, EMP--

SHOULD YOU FAIL TO HOLD, MAKE CERTAIN THAT I FIND YOUR LONG-COLD CORPSE UPON MY ARRIVAL.

AS IT PLEASES YOU, MERCI --

--FUL TCHLUSARUD

HAIL TRANSPORT TO THE DEFENSE FLEET. I GO TO TCHARZIZ.

YOU CANNOT, MY EMPEROR.

I *CANNOT*, GR'BBT?

Ubbah— ubbah— THE HOMEWORLD IS IN *CHAOS*.

Oooh— STARVATION.

Aaah— REBELLION.

Arrrr— YOU HAVE ONLY *JUST* TAKEN THE THRONE.

THE MASSES NEED NOT *KNOW* I'VE LEFT.

AND SHOULD THEY *SUSPECT?*

THEN I SHALL KNOW IT WAS *YOU* WHO INFORMED THEM.

GREAT GOD OF THE RIVER—

CALL FOR MY *TRANSPORT!*

WHAT ARE HIS IMPERIAL LORD'S *ORDERS*?

WE ARE TO HOLD UNTIL THE EMPEROR *ARRIVES*.

THE GREAT TCHLUSARUD *HIMSELF* IS COMING?

YES.

HE WILL NO DOUBT PRAISE OUR *COURAGE*--

"--WHEN HE STANDS OVER OUR *GRAVES*."

ARGO FORCE, REPORT PROGRESS.

THIS LAST SAURIAN REFUGE HOLDS *FIRM*, GENERAL SKUDEEDEN.

WE STORM ITS DEFENSES AGAIN AND AGAIN. I SENSE THEY ARE *WEAKENING*.

BUT I CANNOT *PROMISE* VICTORY BEFORE NIGHTFALL.

FURTHER ORDERS, COMMAND?

A *MOMENT*, ARGO.

ZKKZX, DO YOU HAVE *FINAL* NUMBERS FOR ENEMY CAPTURED?

kklk klik WE HAVE SATISFIED OUR QUOTA FOR AMBULATORY FORCED LABOR, GENERAL *kkck*

REDUCE THE SAURIAN FORTIFICATION BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.

"I WILL WASTE NO MORE RESOURCES ON THESE REPTILES.

"REMOVE THE MAIN FORCE TO A SAFE DISTANCE AND DEPLOY A REVERSE SINGULARITY WEAPON."

"AND THAT WILL BE THE *END* OF THIS CAMPAIGN.

"THE D'RANTH SYSTEM NOW *BELONGS* TO THE NEGATION.

"ALL TROOPS WILL *THEN* MOVE TO THE EQUATORIAL STAGING AREA.

"THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE *END* FOR THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY."

THOSE POOR DAMNED LIZARDS.

STAR POSITION--XT-90000876.5 trns.
THE FRONTIER OF THE D'RANTH SYSTEM.

EMERGING AT *ASSIGNED* DESTINATION, ADMIRAL.

SLOWING TO POINT ONE LIGHT SPEED.

ARE YOU CERTAIN THAT IS *WISE*, MY EMPEROR?

READY MY *FIGHTER*.

WE ARE GETTING *ELEVATED* ENERGY READINGS FROM TCHARZIZ AND ITS MOONS.

RECEIVING SUB-SPACE AND MICROWAVE SHIP-TO-SHIP TRANSMISSIONS.

THERE ARE *THOUSANDS* OF UNKNOWN VESSELS IN-SYSTEM.

WHY MUST EVERYONE QUESTION MY WISDOM, ADMIRAL V'LAKKO?

→URRK← I ONLY FEAR FOR YOUR SAFETY, MY LIEGE— →GRRUK←

SIX OBJECTS *APPROACH* AT POINT SIX LIGHT.

THEY *ELUDED* OUR LONG-RANGE SCANS.

DETAILS ON WHAT *SORT* OF SHIPS THEY ARE? *ARMAMENT?*

THEY SHOW NO *KNOWN* METALS OR COMPOUNDS.

ENERGY SOURCE *UNDETERMINED.* SCANS REVEAL THEY MAY BE--

"--ORGANISMS."

THEY *HAVE* NO ARMAMENT.

SCANS *CONFIRM* THEY ARE LIFE-FORMS!

NOTHING ALIVE COULD *BE* THAT LARGE!

ALL GUNS! *FULL* ARRAY!

TO *FIGHTERS!* WE MAY NEED TO *INTERCEPT* THEM!

AS YOU *COMMAND,* EMPEROR!

OUR GUNS HAVE *NO* EFFECT.

THEY ARE *INSIDE* OUR DEFENSE SHIELDS!

KHYALHTUA'S TEARS~

"*HULL* BREACHES ON LEVELS NINE THROUGH TWELVE!

"LIFE SUPPORT *DETERIORATING!*

"TOXIC ACIDIC GAS OF UNKNOWN NATURE *DISPLACING* ATMOSPHERE."

TO THE *FIGHTER* PODS!
OUR ONLY HOPE IS TO GET *OFF* THE DREADNAUGHT!

WHERE DID THESE MONSTERS *COME* FROM?
LORD TCHLUSARUD! DON'T *FIRE!*
THAT *VAPOR* MAY BE--

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DISTANCE TO TARGET?

TEN SECTORS. TOO FAR FOR *EFFECTIVE* FIRE.

STRENGTH OF FORCE?

DEEP SPACE SCANS ESTIMATE TEN OR *MORE* DREADNAUGHT CLASS VESSELS.

SO, THERE WE *STAND.*

BETWEEN AN UNKNOWN ENEMY AND THE POPULATION CENTER OF THE HUMAN RACE.

AUTHORIZE SCOUT FIGHTERS TO LAUNCH.

"THEY ARE NOT TO *ENGAGE*."

"WE NEED HARD DATA, *NOT* A GUNFIGHT.

"*SIZE* OF THE OPPOSITION AND WEAPONS TRACKING PATHS LAID DOWN."

SCOUT TEAM NOVA REPORTING--

--SETTING *FORWARD* SCANS. CALIBRATE FOR *PATHFINDERS*.

RELAY CONTACT PROFILES.

A *FLEET* COMING ON AT INDETERMINATE SPEED.

THIS IS-- *IMPOSSIBLE.*

CLARIFY.

WE'RE *OUTSIDE* RANGE PARAMETERS. *NO* WEAPON COULD--

BREAK OFF! **BREAK OFF!**

NOVA SQUAD, REPORT!

RESPOND, NOVA!

RESPOND!

"EVERYTHING HAS *CHANGED*.

"THE WORLD IS A DIFFERENT *PLACE* NOW--"

I CAN'T MAKE ANY OF YOU *UNDERSTAND*, ZANNI.

THE NEGATION THREATENS OUR *EXISTENCE*. THEY MAKE THE SAURIANS LOOK LIKE OUR *PALS*.

I KNOW I HAVEN'T SEEN WHAT *YOU'VE* SEEN, SAM. BUT I WAS THERE WHEN ROIYA BECAME THAT-- *THING*.

AND WHILE YOU STAND FEELING *SORRY* FOR YOURSELF, THEY'RE SENDING AN *ARMADA* TOWARD HUMAN SPACE, SAM.

GAIA, DELASSIA, TANIPAL AND *ALL* THE UNION WORLDS ARE IN DANGER AND YOU DO *NOTHING!*

THERE'S A WORLD OF THOSE MONSTERS-- A *UNIVERSE* OF THEM. AND I OPENED THE *DOOR* FOR THEM.

JUST *ONE* NEARLY *KILLED* ME. NOW *MILLIONS* OF MONSTERS ARE POPULATING THE TH'RITH SYSTEMS.

I HAVE TO *SEAL* THE RIFT I CREATED WHEN I KILLED KHYRADON. IT'S *MY* POWERS THAT DID THIS.

AND *ONLY* THOSE POWERS CAN SAVE OUR WORLDS.

I HAVE TO LOOK TO THE *GREATER* GOOD, ZANNI. THESE POWERS WERE GIVEN TO ME FOR A *REASON*.

I HAVE TO DRIVE THE NEGATION OUT OF OUR REALITY--OR THEY'LL CONQUER OUR ENTIRE *UNIVERSE*.

YOU MAY *RIGHT* YOUR ERROR AT THE COST OF BILLIONS OF LIVES.

A UNIVERSE OF THE *DEAD*.

THEY'LL BE *WELCOME* TO IT.

DON'T *TALK* TO ME ABOUT THE GREATER GOOD, SAM.

DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT *ANY* SUBJECT YOU'RE SO IGNORANT OF.

ZANNI--

SAM--

SAM! I'M--

--SORRY.

OKAY--

WHERE AM I *NOW?*

WHO *ARE* YOU? WHAT *WORLD* IS THIS?

ONE OF YOU IS A *SIGIL-BEARER,* RIGHT?

SAMANDAHL REY. I BROUGHT YOU HERE.

JeMERIK?

IT'S *ME,* SAM. IT'S GOOD TO *SEE* YOU.

I NEED YOUR *HELP,* I HAVE TO GET TO *UNION* SPACE. THERE'S AN ATTACK--

THERE ARE MORE *IMPORTANT* MATTERS AT HAND.

Huh?

I WANT YOU TO MEET *CAPRICIA*.

WHAT'RE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT, JeMERIK?

YOU TWO ARE *FATED* TO MEET. YOU SHARE A *DESTINY*.

YOU HAVE A *SIGIL*. WHAT WORLD ARE YOU FROM?

IT'S CALLED *EARTH*-- A WORLD *FAR* FROM HERE.

HAVE YOU *KNOWN* JeMERIK A LONG TIME?

AGES.

DO YOU *KNOW* WHAT ALL OF THIS IS ABOUT?

YOU AND I HAVE A ROLE IN THE *FUTURE* OF OUR UNIVERSE, SAMANDAHL REY.

IS THIS ABOUT THE *NEGATION?* ARE YOU HERE TO HELP ME *FIGHT* THEM?

IN A *WAY*.

SHE'S AS VAGUE AS *YOU* ARE, JeMERIK.

YOU TWO HAVE A *LOT* IN COMMON, SAM.

TELL ME WHAT THIS IS ALL *ABOUT*.

YOU AND SHE MUST PRODUCE A CHILD IF WE ARE TO FIND EVENTUAL *VICTORY.*

CHILD?

A *BABY.* YOU AND CAPRICIA WILL BE THE *PARENTS.* I *ASSUME* YOU KNOW HOW THAT WORKS.

YOU BROUGHT ME A TRILLION MILES FOR A **BLIND DATE?**

MORE THAN A DATE, SAM. YOU SEE--

I *SEE, ALL RIGHT!*

THIS IS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN!

YOU BLIP ME TO WHERE I NEED TO BE RIGHT *NOW,* JeMERIK!

VERY WELL--

I SUPPOSE I *MISCALCULATED* HIS RESPONSE.

"HUMANS ARE SO--*MERCURIAL*."

POSITION?

WE ARE ENTERING THE FAR FRONTIER OF AN AREA INDICATED AS BELONGING TO THE *PLANETARY UNION*.

SPECIES?

HUMAN, ADMIRAL BA'BQUEZAL.

NO *CHALLENGE*, THEN.

CALL UP THE *SYSTEM* CHART FOR ME.

AS YOU *COMMAND*, ADMIRAL.

SO MANY WORLDS *INFESTED* WITH HUMAN PESTS.

WE ARE CLOSEST TO *THIS* ONE--

--DELASSIA.

WE *BEGIN* WITH DELASSIA.

IT APPEARS *DEFENSELESS*. THE HUMANS HAVE *SPENT* THE MAJORITY OF THEIR FORCES, APPARENTLY.

LORD ADMIRAL--

DEEP SCANS HAVE DETECTED A *LIFE* READING.

A *SINGLE* HUMAN IN OUR PLOTTED PATH.

WHAT SORT OF *VESSEL* DOES HE PILOT?

NO VESSEL, LORD ADMIRAL.

REPEAT THAT.

"SO, WHAT DO YOU *THINK* OF HIM?"

DOES IT *MATTER?*

HE'S *ATTRACTIVE* TO YOU? HE IS A MAN YOU MIGHT *CONSIDER* AS A MATE?

DANIK, THIS ASPECT OF YOU--THIS *JeMERIK*-- *HAS* A FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS BUT NO *INKLING* OF THEIR CONSEQUENCE.

ACTUALLY?

I DON'T THINK I *DO.*

THEN HOW CAN I *TRUST* YOUR JUDGMENT IN THIS?

CAPRICIA, I THINK YOU NEED TO GIVE SAM A *CHANCE.* HE'S *QUITE* A SPECIMEN.

I CHOSE HIM FOR A SIGIL BECAUSE OF HIS GENETIC PROFILE. BUT HE'S ALSO *BRAVE* AND RESOURCEFUL.

"HE HAS ACCEPTED THE SIGIL AND *EXCELLED.*

"HE HAS FACED THE NEGATION AND REMAINED *DEFIANT.*

"HE IS WORTHY OF YOUR *RESPECT,* IF NOT YOUR *LOVE,* CAPRICIA."

"HE SUFFERS NOW FOR AN ERROR *HE* MADE.

"AN ERROR THAT MAY *DOOM* HIS RACE.

"AND *STILL* HE FIGHTS.

"HE *KNOWS* ABOUT SACRIFICE.

"HE FACES HIS OWN DESTRUCTION *WITHOUT* FLINCHING."

"THE SIGIL WAS *NOT* GIVEN TO HIM IDLY.

"FOR THE SIGIL *ALONE* CANNOT PERFORM THE TASKS NEEDED TO SAVE THE FUTURE.

"SAMANDAHL REY IS ONE OF A FEW EXTRAORDINARY *BEINGS*.

"THROUGH HIM THE SIGIL'S POWER IS FOCUSED.

"HIS MIND, HIS HEART, HIS COURAGE *FORGE* THE RAW STRENGTH OF THE SIGIL INTO A WEAPON."

HE *REJECTED* ME, JeMERIK.

WHAT?

ZANNI.

THE HUMAN *FEMALE* HE LOVES.

HE WOULD *NEVER* BETRAY HER.

THEN YOUR PLAN COMES TO *NOTHING*.

HE WAS CHOSEN FOR A REASON AS WERE *YOU*, CAPRICIA.

I DON'T LIKE THAT SMILE ONE *BIT*, JeMERIK.

I CAN SEE WHERE THIS REQUIRES A MORE...*SUBTLE* APPROACH.

WE MUST *GO* AND PREPARE.

PREPARE FOR--

--WA

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TAKE A *GOOD* LOOK, SON!

THAT'S COMMANDER *SAMANDAHL REY*--

HERO OF GAIA!

LISTEN *UP*, PEOPLE.

I HAVE SOME *BAD* NEWS FOR YOU AND THE *REST* OF DELASSIA.

THERE'S AN ENEMY FLEET ON ITS *WAY* TO THIS PLANET. YOURS IS THE *FIRST* WORLD THEY'LL ATTACK.

THEY'VE DESTROYED A BATTLEGROUP FROM WARBASE FRONTERA AND *YOU'RE* NEXT.

IS IT THE *LIZARDS* AGAIN, COMMANDER?

WORSE THAN THE SAURIANS.

THEY CALL THEMSELVES THE *NEGATION*.

THEIR MISSION OBJECTIVE IS TO *ANNIHILATE* OR *ENSLAVE* THE HUMAN RACE.

WHICH IS WHY I'M ORDERING THIS PLANET *EVACUATED*.

EVACUATED?

LEAVE OUR *HOMES*?

ABANDON DELASSIA AND ALL WE'VE *WORKED* FOR?

YOU HAVE NO *CHOICE.*

WE'LL STAY AND *FIGHT!*

YOU'LL DIE.

NO ONE CAN FORCE US OFF!

I CAN.

YOU HAVE UNTIL *TOMORROW.*

I NEED *DIRECTIONS* TO THE GOVERNMENT CENTER.

YOU HAVE *BUSINESS* WITH THE PRESIDENT?

PLANETARY UNION BUSINESS.

WHOA. *YOU'RE* COMMANDER REY.

YEAH. AND I REALLY *NEED* TO SEE YOUR WORLD COUNCIL.

I CAN *TAKE* YOU. NOT *EVERY* DAY WE GET A WAR HERO ON DELASSIA.

SAM!

Huh?

ZANNI?

HOW DID YOU--?

THE *BITTERLUCK* DROPPED ME OFF WHEN WE *LOCATED* YOU.

BUT YOU WERE OUT BY THE *THRITH* SYSTEM AND--

--AND WE CAUGHT A FEW LUCKY JUMPS AND HERE I *AM;* BACK ON MY *HOME*WORLD.

YOU'RE GLAD TO *SEE* ME, RIGHT?

SURE. IT'S JUST THAT THIS IS A *BAD* TIME AND--

YEAH. I'M *GLAD* TO SEE YOU, ZANNI.

WE'VE BEEN APART TOO *LONG,* SAM.

THINGS *HAVE* BEEN KIND OF-- EVENTFUL LATELY.

I NEED TO SEE YOUR *PARENTS.* THEY STILL *RUN* DELASSIA, RIGHT?

THEIR TERM IS OVER, SAM. THAGO DHAGLIAN IS PRESIDENT NOW.

YOU SOUND *WORRIED,* SAM.

THINGS DON'T LOOK *GOOD* FOR YOUR PLANET.

"I WISH I COULD FIND A REASON TO *DISBELIEVE* YOU."

BUT OUR *OWN* SURVEY SCANS PICKED UP THE RADIATION BACKWASH FROM THE UNION BATTLEGROUP'S DEMISE.

IS THIS NEGATION'S ARRIVAL *INEVITABLE?*

DELASSIA IS *CLEARLY* THEIR TARGET, PRESIDENT DHAGLIAN.

THE FRONTERA FLEET IS A *MEMORY* AND THE NEAREST UNION FORCES ARE *WEEKS* AWAY.

AND WHAT ABOUT *YOUR* PRODIGIOUS POWERS?

I'M NOT *SURE.* I COULD *SLOW* THEM DOWN--

--BUT IN THE *END* YOU'D HAVE TO LEAVE ANYWAY.

ASK ALL OF MY PEOPLE TO SIMPLY *WALK* AWAY FROM THEIR PAST?

THEIR *FUTURE?*

WE'VE STRUGGLED TOO *LONG* TO TURN THIS DESOLATE ROCK INTO A HOME.

WHERE WOULD WE GO FROM *HERE?*

STAYING IS *NOT* AN OPTION, SIR.

THIS *ISN'T* JUST ANOTHER SAURIAN INCURSION ON UNION SPACE.

THIS IS A WHOLE *UNIVERSE*-- ANOTHER *REALITY*.

IT'S A DARK *MIRROR* IMAGE OF OUR WORLD.

I'VE *SEEN* IT. I DON'T THINK I CAN GET ACROSS TO YOU WHAT THE NEGATION DIMENSION IS LIKE.

ALL I CAN SAY IS, IN ALL MY YEARS AS A SOLDIER I'VE NEVER COME *CLOSE* TO ANYTHING THIS DANGEROUS.

LEAVE DELASSIA, SIR. IT'S *ALREADY* A DEAD WORLD.

GIVE ME SOME *TIME*, COMMANDER.

THIS IS *NOT* A DECISION TO MAKE LIGHTLY.

WHERE'S THE *BITTERLUCK*, ZANNI? WHY DIDN'T ROIYA OR JONS STAY *WITH* YOU?

THEY WERE CALLED TO GAIA. PRIOR *ORDERS*.

AND DID *JeMERIK* COME BACK?

NO. WE HAVEN'T SEEN HIM.

I HAVE. HE HAD SOME CRAZY IDEA ABOUT-- WELL--

ABOUT *WHAT?*

HEY. LOOK WHO IT *IS*.

WHO--?

TROUBLE.

OOP!

HAHAHA

I THOUGHT MAYBE TROUBLE *FORGOT* YOU.

Um--uk-- DOESN'T *LOOK* LIKE IT.

REEOO! UROOO!

I GUESS WE'LL BE TAKING HIM *WITH* US, huh?

HE IS MINE AFTER ALL, *RIGHT?*

NEVER UNDERSTOOD *WHY* YOU PICKED A PSEUDOSAUR FOR A PET.

MAYBE HE REMINDS ME OF *YOU.*

I WISH YOU WEREN'T *HERE,* ZANNI.

THIS PLANET IS IN THE *CROSSHAIRS.* I'D FEEL *BETTER* IF YOU WERE FAR AWAY FROM DELASSIA.

MY PLACE IS WITH *YOU,* SAMANDAHL REY.

NO MATTER *WHAT* COMES ALONG.

"NO MATTER *WHAT* THE FUTURE BRINGS."

TCHARZIZ-
FOURTH PLANET OF THE
D'RANTH SYSTEM WITHIN
THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

"IT IS WITH A HEAVY *HEART* THAT I COME TO YOU."

OUR WORLD LIES UNDER THE **SHADOW** OF A TERRIBLE THREAT.

DELASSIA FACES DESTRUCTION AT THE HANDS OF AN **UNSTOPPABLE** FORCE.

WE UNDERSTOOD THE **RISKS** OF ESTABLISHING A COLONY SO FAR FROM POPULATION CENTER.

WE **ACCEPTED** THEM AS PART OF THE SACRIFICE WE MADE TO CREATE OUR HOME.

BUT NOW THE RISK GROWS TOO **GREAT.**

AND THE SACRIFICE TOO **COSTLY.**

EVERY SPACE-WORTHY VEHICLE IS TO BE MADE AVAILABLE.

THE POPULACE IS ORDERED TO **DEPART** THE SURFACE.

WE LEAVE DELASSIA **BEHIND.**

BUT OUR **HOPES** REMAIN STRONG.

TOMORROW AWAITS US, DELASSIANS.

THEY'RE LEAVING.

SHOULDN'T YOU BE ON A *TRANSPORT?* I DIDN'T *COME* HERE IN A SHIP.

IS THERE *TIME?*

HOURS. MAYBE A WHOLE *DAY.*

QUIET, SAM.

THEN THERE *IS* TIME.

FOR *WHAT,* ZANNI?

unnh?

THAT'S AN *EXPLOSIVE* BRACELET, COLD-BLOOD.

MOVE TOO FAST AND YOU BLEED OUT FROM THE *WRIST*.

MY NAME'S VEGA.

I AM *TCHLUSARUD*. WHY DID YOU SAVE MY *LIFE?*

BECAUSE YOU CAN TELL ME WHERE THOSE GOONS THAT ARE OVERUNNING THIS PLANET *CAME* FROM.

AND I MIGHT GET *HUNGRY*.

WAKEY, WAKEY, SCALEBACK.

IT IS ACCOMPLISHED.

YES.

YOU HAVE DONE WELL, CAPRICIA.

IS *THIS* WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BE BUILT UPON? DECEIT? *LIES?*

EVER MY CAPRICIA.

RETURN ME TO *ATLANTIS.*

AS YOU WISH--

Uh?

ZANNI?

MUST HAVE *GONE.*

DOES THAT MEAN--

--THE *REST* HAVE LEFT THE PLANET.

WHY ARE YOU STILL *HERE?*

THE LAST SHIPS ARE *LEAVING*. THE NEGATION WILL BE HERE BY *DARK*.

OUR *CROPS* ARE NEARLY IN.

WE'VE WORKED ALL *YEAR* FOR THIS SEASON.

WE'RE NOT RUNNING OFF ON JUST *YOUR* WORD.

YOU'LL RISK YOUR *CHILDREN* AND YOUR *OWN* LIVES FOR SOME *GRAIN*?

YOU WON'T *LIVE* TO SEE THE HARVEST!

WE'RE *NOT* LEAVING ALL WE LABORED FOR.

IT MAY NOT BE MUCH TO YOU, BUT IT'S *OURS*.

YOU CAN'T *MAKE* US GO.

YOU HAVE MORE REASON TO *STAY* THAN TO LEAVE?

IDIOTS!

NOW YOU HAVE *NO* REASON TO STAY.

"IT'S A *NEW* DAY."

THE UNION HAS PROMISED US *REFUGE*.

IT'S *BITTER* CHARITY.

HOW COULD THEY *REFUSE* US? AND HOW WILL *WE* THRIVE UNDER SUCH AN UNWANTED OBLIGATION?

DELASSIANS ARE NOT USED TO BEING BURDENS; NOT USED TO BEING *GUESTS*.

YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT *ONE* THING, PRESIDENT DHAGLIAN--

--IT *IS* A NEW DAY.

AND I'M NOT SURE HOW MANY TOMORROWS THE NEGATION WILL *ALLOW* US.

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TCHARZIZ:
FOURTH PLANET OF THE D'RANTH SYSTEM WITHIN THE SAURIAN HEGEMONY.

LIFE FORMS SUSPECTED POSITION !!..!!-DVX!

DESTROYING IMMEDIATE!

LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY'S GOT YOU *ZONED,* SCALEBACK.
MUST BE THOSE *NEGATOR* BUGBOYS.

NEGATION, IGNORANT HUMAN.
NEGA-TOR, NEGA-SHUN.
DON'T MEAN A THING TO ME.
THERE'S TOO MANY TO ARGUE WITH.
WE'D BETTER GET ON THE MOVE, SCALEBACK.
WHY SHOULD I GO WITH YOU?
I KNOW YOU LIZARDS GROW APPENDAGES BACK--
--BUT I DON'T THINK YOU'LL LIKE HAVING YOUR HAND BLOWN OFF.
BESIDES, I TOLD YOU I MIGHT GET HUNGRY.
UNNH!
UHHHH
CAN YOU HEAR ME, SCALEBACK?
I HEAR YOUR MEWLINGS PERFECTLY, HUMAN.
AND MY NAME IS TCHLUSARUD.

WE WILL *LEAVE* THIS PLACE AND YOU WILL HELP ME FIND TRANSPORTATION OFF-WORLD.

THAT MEANS--→*UNH*←-- WALKING RIGHT INTO THEM ***NEGATOS,*** RIGHT?

TOGETHER.

BUT ONLY *I* WILL BE ARMED.

FIGURES.

SO, WHAT D'YOU NEED *ME* ALONG FOR?

AS *YOU* SAID, HUMAN.

I MAY GET ***HUNGRY.***

THIS IS GONNA BE A LONG, ***DUSTY*** WALK, LIZARD.

I AM ***ACCUSTOMED*** TO LONG DRY SPELLS.

WELL, I'M ***NOT.***

THAT IS WHY *YOU* CARRY THE WATER.

WHY DO YOU LIVE ON A ***SAURIAN*** WORLD, HUMAN?

I HAVE A NAME, ***TOO,*** SCALEBACK. IT'S ***VEGA.***

TELL ME, HUMAN.

REVENGE.

LIZARDS ***MURDERED*** EVERYONE ON MY PLANET.

IT WAS ***WAR.***

FUNNY, NOBODY TOLD ***US.***

WHAT BRINGS *YOU* HERE?

MY PEOPLE WERE IN ***JEOPARDY.***

YOUR PEOPLE? YOU ***OWN*** THEM?

I ***RULE*** THEM.

TCHARUN: HOMEWORLD OF THE SAURIAN EMPIRE.

YOU ***HEARD*** ME, SIRS.

LORD TCHLUSARUD IS ***DEAD.***

WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

HOW WILL WE *CHOOSE* A NEW LEADER?

THIS CREATES A *DANGEROUS* POWER VOID.

NOT IF *I* TAKE OVER AS PROTECTOR IN THE INTERIM.

AN *OUTRAGE*. YOU ARE LITTLE MORE THAN A *CLERK*.

YOU, GRRBT?

WHAT *EXPERIENCE* DO YOU HAVE?

BY WHAT *RIGHT* DO YOU CLAIM LEADERSHIP?

THE RIGHT OF OPPORTUNE *ALLIANCES*.

GENERAL HCKABBA, COULD YOU *EXPLAIN* MY POSITION TO THE COUNCIL?

WITH *PLEASURE*, LORD GRRBT.

THIS WILL NOT *HOLD*, GENERAL!

THERE WILL MOST *CERTAINLY* BE A VOTE ON THIS!

THERE ARE *RULES* OF ORDER!

LORD GRRBT GIVES THE ORDERS. AND HIS ORDERS ARE TO--

AN EXPEDIENT END TO *THAT* CACOPHONY.

-FIRE!

POLITICIANS ARE A *NECESSARY* EVIL, MY LORD. BUT THERE IS NO REASON TO TOLERATE *MORE* THAN NECESSARY.

WELL *SAID*, HCKABBA--

"--I SEE A *WISE* CHOICE IN TYING MY FUTURE TO YOURS."

WHAT DO YOU *MAKE* OF THIS, HUMAN?

I DUNNO. YOU'RE THE GENERAL.

A *MINEFIELD* OF SOME SORT.

LOOKS LIKE WE GO *AROUND*.

I SEE NO *CAUSE* FOR THAT.

Huh?

START *WALKING*.

STINKIN' SCALEBACK SON OF A--

I DON'T KNOW WHAT GOOD IT WILL DO *YOU*--

--IF I'M BLASTED TO *SHREDS*.

NO *BANG*, SCALEBACK. MUST BE *DUDS*.

OR *DETECTION* DEVICES.

Tek

Uh?

AUTOMATED GUARDIANS!

THEY'RE SET FOR MOTION OR PROXIMITY!

OR GENETIC MAKEUP.

LOOKS LIKE HUMANS DON'T SET THEM OFF.

TOUGH LUCK, LIZARD. THEY AIN'T LOOKIN' FOR VEGA!

WE SHARE OUR FORTUNES, REMEMBER?

THAT MEANS DANGERS AS WELL, HUMAN!

STAY AWAY FROM ME!

OOP!

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS, HUMAN.

YOU MAY HAVE A GUN BACK.

YOU PLAY DIRTY, SCALEBACK.

I DO NOT PLAY AT ALL.

EACH TIME WE MOVE, WE ACTIVATE MORE OF THESE DEVICES.

NO WAY WE'LL SHOOT OUR WAY OUT OF THIS.

WE'LL HAVE TO CLEAR A PATH.

STAND BACK, LIZARD.

THIS COULD GET LOUD.

OOOF!

UH!

TIME TO *MOVE!*

THE NEGATION FORCES WILL *INVESTIGATE* THAT BLAST.

YOU'RE TOUGH TO *PLEASE,* LIZARD.

I SAVE YOUR LIFE AND YOU'RE *CARPING.*

YOU DID WHAT YOU DID TO SAVE *YOURSELF.*

YOU WILL HAND OVER THAT *WEAPON* I LOANED YOU.

MAN~

RADIATION SIGNATURE DOES NOT MATCH NEGATION ENERGY PROFILES.

IT IS SOMEWHAT STRUGGLING, THO.

WE WAIT UNTIL THEY GET *CLOSER* AND THEN--

ARE YOU *LISTENING*, HUMAN?

YO, BUG-FACE!

OVER HERE!

WHAT ARE YOU *THINKING?*

IT'S *YOU* THEY'RE LOOKING FOR, NOT *ME*, PAL.

KILL THEM BOTH.

SIGH!

YOU ARE STUPID EVEN FOR A *HUMAN.*

UH!

I THOUGHT THIS WAS--*UNH*-- A *SAURIAN* THING.

THE NEGATION IS AT WAR WITH OUR *UNIVERSE,* FOOL.

THEY SEEK TO WIPE OUR REALITY CLEAN OF *ALL* LIFE.

TORCH

TORCH

THAT INCLUDES YOUR RACE!

HEY!

I'M COMING *WITH* YOU!

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU ARE *WELCOME*, BETRAYER?

YOU COULD USE AN EXTRA *GUN*.

A *PRACTICAL* CONSIDERATION, HUMAN.

BUT DO NOT RELY ON THAT ASSUMPTION *AGAIN*.

YOU ARE SECOND ONLY TO ONE OTHER HUMAN IN EARNING MY *LOATHING*.

YEAH? WHO'S THE *OTHER* GUY ON YOUR HATE LIST?

SAMANDAHL REY.

YOU KNOW HIM, TOO?

YOU AND ME MIGHT HAVE A LOT IN *COMMON*, SCALEBACK.

THE NEGATION *BASE* IS AHEAD. WE'LL FIND OFF-PLANET TRANSPORT *THERE*.

WE'RE *OUTNUMBERED* HERE.

SERIOUSLY OUTNUMBERED.

WE HAVE THE ELEMENT OF *SURPRISE.*

I GOTTA *TELL* YA, PAL--

--WE SPENT *ALL* OUR SURPRISE ALREADY.

NOW WE'RE EITHER LUCKY OR WE'RE *DEAD.*

WE ARE AT THE *HEART* OF THE NEGATION INVASION.

WE'RE *DEAD*

WHAT *IS* THAT FIELD?

I DO NOT *KNOW,* HUMAN, BUT THEY LEAD MY *SUBJECTS* INTO IT.

IS THIS HOW THEY'RE *EXTERMINATING* YOU LIZARDS?

NO. SEE HOW THE *INSECTS* ENTER IT THEMSELVES?

IT IS A *GATEWAY.*

TO *WHERE?*

AGAIN, I DO NOT *KNOW--*

--BUT I INTEND TO *FIND OUT!*

AW, NO!

DO YOU *REGRET* ACCOMPANYING ME, HUMAN?

I TELL YOU *THIS* MUCH--

--IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE LANDED US IN THE MIDDLE OF A WAR--

FEELS LIKE GOING HOME.

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IT WAS A MASSACRE.

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years ago, the human worlds of
the Planetary Union became enmeshed
in a war against the lizard-like Saurians of
Tcharun —a war the humans could not help
but win. Time and again, the Saurian encampments
fell victim to human technology, human strategy,
human cunning. Mankind's victory was assured.

But a single Saurian's dilemma
would change all that...

From the poison in your fangs,
To the sharpness of your claws,
To the armor of your skin,
I create you, free from flaws.

Blessed Saurian, born to battle,
In the sacrament of War,
Know your body is your weapon,
You require nothing more.

The Song of Khyalhtua

I REMEMBER REPEATING THOSE STANZAS OVER AND OVER IN MY HEAD, PRAYING THAT THE WORDS OF THE WAR-GODDESS WERE INDEED TRUE.

FOR I WAS EMPTY-HANDED AND MY ENEMIES WERE UPON ME.

IT SEEMED LIKE SOME CRUEL JOKE OF NATURE.

THE MAMMALS LOOKED SO **SOFT** AND **WEAK,** LACKING ALL THE VISIBLE HALLMARKS OF SUCCESSFUL HUNTERS.

WE SAURIANS, ON THE OTHER HAND, COMBINED ALL THE BEST TRAITS FROM A WORLD FILLED WITH PREDATORS.

SO **HOW,** I WONDERED, COULD WE POSSIBLY HAVE LOST EVERY SINGLE BATTLE AGAINST THIS, THE FIRST ALIEN RACE WE HAD EVER ENCOUNTERED?

THAT WAS OVER FOUR HUNDRED ORBITS AGO, WHEN OUR WAR WITH THE MAMMALS WAS STILL FAIRLY NEW...

...WHEN MY **FAITH** WAS FIRST PUT TO THE TEST.

BUT AT THE MOMENT, IT SEEMED THAT ONLY MY **LIFE** WAS AT RISK.

THE TIME FOR HIDING WAS OVER. I HAD TO **USE** THE WEAPONS KHYALHTUA HAD BLESSED ME WITH...

...NO MATTER HOW MUCH IT TURNED MY STOMACH.

SYLICKT!

RATATATATATAT

BRAATT

POP POP

BLAM

HEY! WATCH IT! GET ME! GET ME!

FOCUS, PATIENCE, CONTROL. IN DIVINITY SCHOOL I'D LEARNED THAT THESE WERE THE KEYS TO VICTORY WITH HONOR.
BRRRAAAT
POP
POP
THAT WAS BEFORE I WAS DRAFTED AND THRUST INTO A WAR WHERE IT SEEMED THAT HONOR HAD NO PLACE.
OKAY, THAT'S SOMETHING.
SPLISHHHHH
FWOOOSH
THIS WAR WAS ONLY ABOUT ONE THING: SURVIVAL.
SO BE IT. WE SAURIANS ARE NOTHING IF NOT SURVIVORS.

HSSS!
THEY THOUGHT TO TRAP ME. WHAT THEY SAW AS MY DOOM, I SAW AS MY ESCAPE.
ONE GOOD BREATH, AND I COULD SWIM TO FREEDOM UNDER COVER OF THE FLAMES.
IF ONLY I WASN'T ALREADY WEAKENED -- NOT HAVING EATEN SINCE LONG BEFORE I WAS SEPARATED FROM MY SQUAD.
STILL, MY GREATEST TREASURE WAS NOT LOST, SO I CLUNG TO HOPE.

pOp pOp

BLAM

DESPERATION DROVE ME BEYOND MY BETTER JUDGMENT...

...WHILE THE MAMMALS WERE DRIVEN BY BLIND HATRED.

NEITHER PATH BEARS FOLLOWING.

Combat is a river dark,
The current fast and frigid.
It flows around the reed that bends,
Yet sweeps away the rigid.

The Song of Khyalhtua

GASP!!

TOOK OUT!

HOW FAR WE'D DRIFTED, I COULD NOT SAY. BUT THE MAMMALS WERE STILL NEARBY...

...AND ONE HAD BEEN FATALLY CARELESS.

TO!

K-CHK

ZLZL, JK? VOX! QUICK!

BUT IN THE PRECIOUS MOMENTS IT TOOK ME TO FIGURE OUT THEIR WEAPON...

FOR GOD'S SAKE, SWITCH ON THE *VOX!* MAKE HIM *UNDERSTAND!*

KILL US, AND THERE'LL BE NO ONE LEFT TO WORK THE *NAVIGATOR.*

YOU'LL BE *LOST*-- AND AS GOOD AS *DEAD!*

THEY WERE SHREWD ENOUGH TO APPEAL TO MY INTELLIGENCE. NEVERTHELESS, I HESITATED FOR HOURS, UNSURE IF I COULD TRUST THEM.
REACTIVATE THE DEVICE! I WANT TO UNDERSTAND YOUR CHATTER!
WANTS TO LISTEN TO US, TO MAKE SURE WE'RE NOT SCHEMING AGAINST HIM.
AT EASE, DUDE. WE WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT THE ZYGORS. WE'RE ALL SCREWED IF WE JUST KEEP SITTING HERE...
THEIR SOFT, SWEATY FACES ALL LOOKED THE SAME TO ME. I HADN'T A CLUE IF THAT WAS FEAR OR DECEPTION IN THEIR EYES.
...ZYGORS...?
HE DOESN'T KNOW.
THEY DIDN'T BRIEF YOU?! MAN, I DON'T BELIEVE IT. THE ZYGORS, MAN! THEY LOOK KINDA LIKE THIS, ONLY BIG AS AN ORBITAL TROOP TRANSPORT!
THEY HAVE LITTLE HOOKS ON THEIR TONGUES THAT STRIP THE MEAT RIGHT OFF YOUR BONES.
JUST ONE ADULT COULD EAT US ALL, AND HAVE THAT FLAME-THROWER FOR DESSERT!
I'D SEEN NO SPOOR, NO TRACE OF SUCH A BEAST...BUT THE MAMMALS HAD COLONIZED THIS WORLD LONG BEFORE MY BATALLION EVER LANDED HERE.
THEY'RE NOCTURNAL. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME. WE'D LIKE TO PROPOSE A BARGAIN.

BARGAIN?

OUR BASE CAMPS AREN'T TOO FAR APART--

--A KLIK, MAYBE TWO, WITH A NO-MAN'S LAND IN BETWEEN.

WE FIGURE WE'RE A GOOD DAY'S HIKE AWAY --BUT WE'LL NAVIGATE *ALL* OF US BACK TO THE NEUTRAL ZONE IF YOU PROMISE NOT TO KILL US.

DEAL?

SHH!

I HEAR SOMETHING COMING! CAN'T *YOU?*

IT'S THE FRIGGIN *ZYGORS,* MAN--!

*IT WAS TRUE. I **DID** HEAR SOMETHING APPROACHING.*

SEVERAL SOMETHINGS.

I TRIED TO WEIGH MY OPTIONS WISELY, BUT I WAS NO TACTICIAN.

*THE ONLY PREVIOUS COMBAT I'D KNOWN WAS RITUAL SPARRING. THIS WAS ALL FAR TOO **REAL**.*

*SO MY THOUGHTS TURNED TO THE **SCRIPTURES** THAT HAD EVER BEEN MY GUIDE, AND THE ANSWER CAME AT ONCE...*

Of all the forms of victory,
The highest on the tally
Belongs to he who turns a
Vanquished foe into an ally.

The Song of Khyalhtua

AS WE MARCHED, MY FEAR OF WHAT STALKED US GRADUALLY GAVE WAY TO THE AWE I FELT AT SEEING THESE BEINGS UP CLOSE.

JUST AS THEY COULD NOT RECOGNIZE MY OWN MOST IMPORTANT POSSESSION, I WONDERED WHAT CRUCIAL DETAIL I MIGHT BE OVERLOOKING ON THEM.

I TRIED TO MEMORIZE ALL OF THEIR FASCINATING, BAFFLING FEATURES...

...SUCH AS THE FINE, FLEECY **STRANDS** THAT GREW FROM THEIR HEADS...

...OR THE **DISCOLORATION** ON THAT ONE'S NECK--SOMETHING I WOULD LATER LEARN THEY CALL A "BIRTHMARK."

WHEN THE POINT MAN SIGNALED THAT HE'D HEARD SOMETHING, WE WAITED WHILE HE SCOUTED THE WAY AHEAD.

I ADMIRED HIS COURAGE AND WORRIED FOR HIS SAFETY...

...AND THAT WAS WHEN IT **HIT** ME...

...DESPITE OUR DIFFERENCES, WE HAD BEEN **UNITED** BY FEAR.

Oh, GOD...

WHAT HAPPENED?

M-MUST BE A ZYGOR NEARBY! I RAN INTO ONE OF ITS ***KILLS***...

I **HAD** TO SEE FOR MYSELF--TO **PROVE** THEY COULD BE TRUSTED.

I WAS ACTUALLY **RELIEVED** TO SEE THAT THE CARCASS WAS STRIPPED TO THE BONE, JUST AS THEY **SAID** IT WOULD BE.

AND I KNEW RIGHT THEN AND THERE THAT IF WE EVER MADE IT HOME ALIVE--

--I WOULD DEDICATE MYSELF TO **ENDING** THIS WAR WITH NO PURPOSE...

...AND NO HONOR.

WE STOPPED WHEN THEY COULD GO NO FURTHER. BY THEN, MY ACHING HUNGER MADE ME NEARLY AS WEAK AS THEM.

BUT UNLIKE THE MAMMALS WITH THEIR QUICK METABOLISMS, I COULD NOT RISK A NAP FROM WHICH ONLY THE HEAT OF THE SUN COULD AWAKEN ME.

SO I OPENED THE PRECIOUS TUBE CLIPPED TO MY BELT AND SOUGHT THE ONLY REAL **SUSTENANCE** I'D BROUGHT WITH ME...

K-CHK

RELAX! I JUST WANNA ***TALK,*** 'KAY? JUST... JUST...

YOU, uh...YOU GOT A ***NAME?***

...

TERCHAC.

TERCH—

TER-CH—

TER***CHAC!***

I THINK I SWALLOWED MY ***TONGUE...***

I'M ***PEPO.***

WHAT'S ***THAT?*** A LETTER FROM YOUR GIRLFRIEND?

HARDLY. IT IS THE ***SONG OF KHYALHTUA,*** OUR MOST SACRED SCROLL.

I...STUDIED FOR THE ***PRIESTHOOD.*** I WAS A GOOD PUPIL, TOO, AND YET... I CANNOT FIND ONE GOOD REASON ***WHY*** WE MUST DESTROY EACH OTHER.

BEATS ME. I ALWAYS GOT TOLD *YOU GUYS* STARTED IT.

NOT THAT I BELIEVE EVERYTHING THE POLITICIANS AND GENERALS SAY. PERSONALLY, I FIGURE IT COMES DOWN TO JUST ***ONE THING:***

SURVIVAL. WE WANNA ***LIVE.***

TRUE. SO, HOW'S A ***PRIEST*** FEEL ABOUT BEING A ***SOLDIER?*** I MEAN, DON'T YOUR PRIESTS BELIEVE THAT LIFE'S, LIKE, ***SACRED?***

NOT ***ALL*** COMBAT ENDS IN DEATH. WE USUALLY FIGHT TO ***STRENGTHEN,*** NOT KILL, EACH OTHER.

EVEN IF YOU ***MUST*** TAKE A LIFE, THE GODS OF MY PEOPLE ***SMILE*** UPON A GOOD, CLEAN KILL...

...BUT NOT A ***WASTEFUL*** SLAUGHTER.

THERE HASN'T BEEN A SHRED OF FOCUS, PATIENCE OR CONTROL IN ***ANYTHING*** I'VE SEEN SINCE MY CONSCRIPTION.

AT LEAST WE CAN BOTH AGREE ON *THAT.*

THEN SOMETHING RUSTLED OUT IN THE FOREST, AND NAKED FEAR SWEPT ACROSS MY COMPANION'S FACE.

IN JUST A FEW HOURS, I'D COME A LONG WAY IN READING THEIR SIMIAN FEATURES.

GUYS! WAKE UP!

THIS TIME, NOT ONLY COULD I HEAR IT, I COULD SEE MOVEMENT IN THE BRUSH.

IF THE ZYGOR HAD OUR SCENT, THEN IT WAS SURELY THICK WITH TERROR.

COME ON! LET'S GET OUTTA HERE!

THE MORNING SUN AND THE DELICIOUS HUMIDITY SAPPED THE MAMMALS EVEN AS IT ENERGIZED ME...

...AS THEIR PACE SLOWED, I COULD HEAR OUR PURSUIT STALKING CLOSER AND CLOSER.

UH-OH...

WHAT'S WRONG?

WE'RE SCREWED.

THEY CHATTERED USELESSLY, HAVING LED US TO OUR DOOM...AND I JUST WANTED TO SCREAM...

...BECAUSE THE SOUNDS APPROACHING FROM BEHIND US MADE IT CLEAR THAT MY INSIGHTS WOULD SOON DIE WITH ME, AND THIS MOCKERY OF A WAR WOULD GRIND MINDLESSLY ON...

DO SOMETHING!

YEAH, OR ELSE GIVE *ME* THE FLAMETHROWER!

NO! HE'S STRONGER THAN *ALL* OF US -- HE'S GOT THE BEST CHANCE!

SCREW THE *WAR*, SCREW *EVERYTHING!* I WANT TO *LIVE!*

COME ON, TERCHAC! IF YOUR GODS WANT A *GOOD* KILL, THEN *THIS IS IT!*

BUT NOW! WHILE YOU'VE STILL GOT A CHANCE! IT WON'T EXPECT YOU TO *ATTACK* IT!

YOU CAN *DO* THIS. JUST KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, CHARGE, AND SQUEEZE THAT TRIGGER UNTIL THE THING'S ALL OUT OF FUEL.

AND KEEP YOUR EYES *SHUT* IN CASE THERE'S ANY BACK-SPRAY, OKAY? GOOD LUCK, PAL.

HOW DID A FOOLISH INTERPLANETARY WAR LEAD TO THIS MOMENT?

I PRAYED TO BLESSED KHYALHTUA FOR COURAGE.

I CLOSED MY EYES, PULLED THE TRIGGER, AND HOPED MY RECKLESS CHARGE WOULD BE ENOUGH.

FWAP

AND WHEN THE WEAPON WENT DEAD IN MY HANDS...

...I OPENED MY EYES...

...AND SAW THE SOLDIERS OF MY OWN SQUAD.

BURNT TO CINDERS, EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM.

THE MAMMALS WERE NOWHERE TO BE SEEN. AND SUDDENLY I **KNEW.**

THERE WAS **NEVER** A ZYGOR.

THE MAMMALS KNEW MY SQUAD WAS ON THEIR HEELS. SO THEY DREW THE **PICTURE,** THEY STOKED THE FLAMES OF MY **FEAR**...

...AND THE ONE WITH THE BIRTHMARK EVEN KILLED THE ANIMAL I SAW AND FLAYED THE FLESH FROM ITS BONES. ALL TO FURTHER THE **LIE.**

THIS WAS MY **PUNISHMENT** FOR LACKING FAITH IN THE WAR.

THIS WAS ALSO KHYALHTUA'S BITTER LESSON FOR ME: THAT THESE CREATURES LACKED ANY SHRED OF HONOR.

TOO LATE I REALIZED WHY WE **MUST** KILL THEM ALL.

HSSS!

SKLUTCH

SHRAKT

KLUDD

SNAPT

SHLUK

YES, I FINALLY **KNEW.** BUT AT WHAT COST? I WAS EVEN WEAKER THAN BEFORE...

...DELIRIOUS FROM BLOOD LOSS...AND THE **HUNGER,** LIKE A BLACK HOLE IN MY GUT...

...NOT EVEN MY SQUAD'S SUPPLIES COULD HELP ME. ANY FOOD THEY CARRIED WAS NOW REDUCED TO **ASH.**

MY WHOLE LIFE HAD LED TO THESE FIVE MINUTES OF SLAUGHTER.

MY **WHOLE** LIFE...

THE GODDESS HAD PROVIDED ALL I NEEDED TO MAKE THE JOURNEY, AND I **WOULD** MAKE IT BACK...

KLAK KLAK

FWOOSH

STILL, I KNEW I WOULD LIVE... NO MATTER WHAT IT TOOK.

...BECAUSE WE SAURIANS ARE, IF NOTHING ELSE...

...SURVIVORS.

AT LAST, STRENGTH RETURNED TO MY LIMBS. MY **BELLY** FILLED WITH MEAT EVEN AS MY **HEARTS** FILLED WITH HORROR.

BUT I WOULD SOMEHOW MAKE PEACE WITH THIS.

I WOULD WASH THE TAINT FROM MY MOUTH, AND RETURN TO THE **WAR** I KNEW TO BE **JUST**.

IN THE END, THIS TEST OF FAITH WOULD GIVE ME NEW **WISDOM**...

...AND **CHANGE** ME IN WAYS I COULD NEVER HAVE FORSEEN.

Combat always leaves its mark,
But scars should bring no sorrow.
Wise warriors know a loss today
Brings victory tomorrow.

The Song of Khyalhtua

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The Song of Khyalhtua

AS A NEOPHYTE DIVINITY SCHOLAR, I THOUGHT I KNEW WHAT THAT SCRIPTURE MEANT. THEN CAME THE WAR WITH THE HUMANS...

...AND AFTER I'D FOUGHT THE ENEMY, AFTER I'D TASTED THEIR TREACHERY AND FOUNDED THE CHURCH OF TRANSFORMATION BASED ON THE BITTER LESSONS I'D LEARNED...

...THAT SCRIPTURE MEANT SOMETHING **ELSE** ENTIRELY.

TWO CENTURIES LATER, WHEN THE ANCIENT **ORDER OF KHYALHTUA** SOUGHT TO STAMP OUT MY FLEDGLING CHURCH, ITS MEANING WOULD CHANGE FOR ME YET AGAIN.

BUT THAT'S THE MIRACLE OF THE HOLY WRIT: ITS TRUTH CONTINUES TO **EVOLVE,** EVEN AS **I** DO.

YOU ALL KNOW MY TESTAMENT:

"WHEN FIRST WE WARRED WITH THE HUMANS, THE PROPHET WAS BUT A SOLDIER, STRANDED ON A SAVAGE WORLD WITH THREE OF THE ENEMY.

"THE WICKED MAMMALS **DECEIVED** THE PROPHET, OFFERING FRIENDSHIP EVEN AS THEY SET HIM AGAINST HIS SAURIAN BROTHERS.

"ONLY AFTER MISTAKENLY SLAYING HIS FELLOW FIGHTERS, DID HE SMITE THE HUMANS IN THEIR TURN."

YES, BUT BY THEN ***STARVATION*** WAS UPON ME. I AM ONLY HERE TODAY BECAUSE I FORCED MYSELF TO ***DEVOUR*** ONE OF MY FALLEN FOES.

WHEN I SAW THE ***CHANGE*** IT BROUGHT UPON ME — MY SAURIAN FLESH ***REMAKING*** ITSELF IN THE IMAGE OF MAMMALS — I WAS ***HORRIFIED.***

"FEAR BOWS TO WISDOM. CHANGE MUST BE EMBRACED."

TRUE...BUT IT TOOK ME TIME TO REALIZE THIS. MANY OUTSIDE THESE WALLS ***STILL*** FEAR THE CHANGE WE REPRESENT.

INFORM THE MASTER THAT WE ARE IN POSITION. THE SO-CALLED CHURCH OF TRANSFORMATION IS CELEBRATING ITS FINAL SERVICE.

"THEY SAY WE CORRUPT SAURIAN PERFECTION..."

...WE KNOW THE *TRUTH.*

NOW RECEIVE THE *SALVATION* OF OUR PEOPLE.

"FROM OUR BITTEREST ENEMIES WE SEIZE OUR FINEST WEAPONS."

AMEN.

ARM PLASMA CANNONS. FIRE ON MY MARK...

WE CELEBRATE THE COMMUNION OF DOMINANT SPECIES...

...THE TRANSMOGRIFICATION OF BASE HUMAN FLESH INTO SANCTIFIED SAURIAN--

ZARK

ZAZZ

BOOM

ZARK

MONSTERS!

FREAKS!

MAINTAIN YOUR *FOCUS*, MEN! LOCATE THE PRIME TARGET!

WHERE *IS* HE? WHERE'S *TERCHAC?*

LOOK... BY THOSE *STONES...*

IS HE *DEAD?*

ALIVE... AND SLIPPERY AS EVER...

I'D KNOWN FOR MONTHS AN ATTACK WAS COMING, BUT I'D EXPECTED SOMETHING LESS OVERT, LIKE A LONE ASSASSIN.

THE RUTHLESSNESS OF THIS FRONTAL ASSAULT HAD CAUGHT ME UNPREPARED.

*AS I CURSED MY STUPIDITY, MY MEMORY RACED BACK OVER TWO HUNDRED ORBITS, TO THE **LAST** TIME I'D BEEN SO TRAGICALLY **NAÏVE**...*

...I HAD COME HOME FROM THE WAR IN SHACKLES-- THE FREAK WHO'D **EATEN** A HUMAN WAS NOW **TURNING INTO** ONE.

MY DESPERATE ACT BROUGHT TO LIGHT AN EVOLUTIONARY ADAPTATION WE HAD LONG FORGOTTEN: OUR ABILITY TO **ABSORB** PHYSICAL TRAITS FROM THE ANIMALS WE CONSUME.

SINCE WE HAD ABSORBED ALL WE NEEDED FROM THE OTHER SPECIES ON TCHARUN EONS AGO, SAURIAN PHYSIOLOGY REMAINED UNCHANGED UNTIL I DEVOURED **ALIEN** FLESH.

THE SCIENTISTS COULDN'T GET ENOUGH OF ME. MY CASE WAS A **REVELATION.** THEY SLICED AND SAMPLED ME FOR **YEARS,** EVEN FORCING ME TO CONSUME **MORE** ENEMY FLESH.

IN TIME THEY LEARNED HOW THE INGESTION METAMORPHOSIS WORKED.. AND HOW TO **ACCELERATE** THE RESULTS.

IT WAS THEIR LAST-DITCH EFFORT TO ACHIEVE A BALANCE OF POWER IN THE ALL-BUT-LOST WAR AGAINST THE HUMANS. AND IT **WORKED.**

MORE CAPTURED HUMANS WERE FED TO MORE TEST SUBJECTS LIKE MYSELF. WITH HUMAN GUILE AND INNOVATION, WE MADE **BREAK-THROUGHS** IN WEAPONS AND PROPULSION TECHNOLOGY.

FROM OUR HIDDEN TESTING FACILITY, WE SECRETLY SAVED THE SAURIAN RACE FROM **CONQUEST.**

BUT THE ONLY WAY I SURVIVED THOSE TORTUROUS YEARS WITH MY SANITY INTACT WAS TO MAKE PEACE WITH THE **SCIENCE** BEHIND THE BLOODBATH ALL AROUND ME.

I SPREAD TO THE OTHERS MY BELIEF THAT OUR EVOLUTION WAS A GIFT OF VICTORY FROM MIGHTY KHYALHTUA, GODDESS OF WAR. IT WAS THE START OF A NEW FAITH ON TCHARUN...

...AND A CLASH OF CULTURES THAT TURNED MY FORMER TEACHER INTO MY GREATEST ENEMY--THE FOE WHO SLAUGHTERED MY CONGREGATION...

...WEAPONSMASTER HRUKKAN, HOLY FATHER OF THE ORDER OF KHYALHTUA.

WHAT ARE THE THREE KEYS TO VICTORY?

FOCUS! PATIENCE! CONTROL!

Heh. EASY TO *SAY*...

...BUT HARD TO *EMBODY*.

ARE YOU PREPARED TO *SHOW* ME THE MEANING OF THE WAR GODDESS' LESSON?

YES, WEAPONSMASTER!

Hmm. NO PATIENCE...

SHRANG

AHHH!

...NO FOCUS...

KCHANG

...BE THANKFUL *I* HAVE CONTROL.

IT'S A *FLEETING* THING: CONTROL...

YOU *ALMOST* ACHIEVED IT OVER *ME* TODAY. YOU SHOULD HAVE HAD MORE *PATIENCE.*

TERCHAC! YOU ALWAYS WERE OVERLY DRAMATIC, EVEN AS AN ACOLYTE...

WEAPONSMASTER!

STAND DOWN!

SMART MOVE. YOUR THROAT WOULD BE *WIDE OPEN* BEFORE THEY TOOK TWO STEPS.

I DON T *NEED* MY STUDENTS TO DEAL WITH *YOU,* HERETIC.

LEAVE US! AND TELL *NO ONE* OF THIS! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

Y-YES, WEAPONSMASTER.

DO YOU KNOW WHY YOUR CHURCH HAS TO GO, TERCHAC? BECAUSE YOU POSE A GRAVER *THREAT* TO THE FUTURE OF TCHARUN THAN THE HUMANS *EVER* DID.

JUST AS WE CAN RE-GROW LOST LIMBS, SO DO THE GODS *REWARD* US WHEN WE DIE WITH THE MIRACLE OF *REINCARNATION.*

TELL ME HOW THE GODS--WHO *CREATED* US IN *THEIR* IMAGE--CAN ALLOW US THE CYCLE OF RENEWAL IF *YOU* PERVERT THE SACRED FORM THEY GAVE US?

SOON, KHYALHTUA WILL PUNISH *ALL* THE DEAD OF TCHARUN FOR *YOUR* SINS.

YOU UNDERESTIMATE THE GODS. ***NOTHING*** HAPPENS WITHOUT THEIR ***WILLING*** IT.

WEAPONSMASTER...?

BE GONE, ***CHRCHOK***. I HAVE THIS SITUATION UNDER CONTROL.

YOU COULDN'T BE ANY MORE ***WRONG***. HAVE YOU ANY IDEA WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE ***TRUTH*** GOT OUT ABOUT HOW WE ***REALLY*** RETOOK THE INITIATIVE IN THE WAR?

THOSE WARRIORS OF YOURS ALL THINK IT WAS THE WAR GODDESS HERSELF WHO TIPPED THE SCALES BACK IN OUR FAVOR.

IF THEY FOUND OUT THEY OWE IT ALL TO ***ABOMINATIONS*** LIKE ME, WE'D SOON HAVE A CIVIL WAR ON OUR HANDS. TCHARUN WOULD BE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF... AND EASY PICKINGS FOR THE MAMMALS.

THAT IS WHAT YOU RISKED BY ATTACKING MY CONGREGATION. STARTING A HOLY WAR AGAINST ME WILL DOOM US ***BOTH***.

ATTACKING YOU? I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

LIAR!

⇒AHH⇐ I **SWEAR** I'VE MADE NO MOVE AGAINST YOU. BUT...LET ME FIND OUT WHO **DID.**

LET ME **LEAD** YOU TO THEM. PERHAPS WE CAN STILL KEEP YOUR SECRET, AND OUR WORLD ON TRACK TO VICTORY. AGREED?

*I THOUGHT BACK TO THE **LAST** TIME I ALLIED MYSELF WITH AN ENEMY. COULD IT POSSIBLY END AS BADLY THIS TIME AROUND?*

***NO.** IT COULD **NOT.** I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO.*

"WISE ARE WARRIORS WHO CAN FIND RIVALS WORTHY OF THEIR TRUST."

VERY WELL, HRUKKAN, I'LL GRANT YOU THE CHANCE TO ***PROVE*** YOUR GOOD FAITH. MAY THIS PARTNERSHIP LEAD US TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ***ALL*** SAURIANS.

BELIEVE ME, TERCHAC...

...I'LL MAKE CERTAIN THAT IT ***DOES.***

HRUKKAN SPENT THE REST OF THAT FATEFUL DAY VISITING CONTACT AFTER CONTACT, PAINSTAKINGLY FERRETING OUT THE IDENTITY OF WHOEVER HAD ORDERED THE DESTRUCTION OF MY CHURCH.

I COULDN'T KEEP CLOSE ENOUGH TO HEAR EVERYTHING THAT WAS SAID--

--BUT I NEVER LET HIM OUT OF MY SIGHT.

AND, I MUST ADMIT, HAVING THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL LEADER ON ALL OF TCHARUN AS MY PERSONAL ERRAND-BOY GAVE ME NO END OF SATISFACTION.

IN TIME, HE LEARNED THAT THE FACTION WHICH STRUCK AGAINST ME WAS GATHERING FOR A SECRET MEETING THAT VERY NIGHT.

WE CREPT OUT TO THE APPOINTED PLACE, INTENT ON DESTROYING THOSE WHO HAD SOUGHT TO START A CIVIL WAR. OUR MUTUAL INTERESTS WERE CLEAR ENOUGH THAT I ALLOWED HRUKKAN TO ARM HIMSELF WITH A **ZAKRI.**

IN THE HANDS OF THE WEAPONSMASTER, THE DOUBLE-BLADED WEAPON WAS DEADLIER THAN ANY ORDNANCE WE WERE LIKELY TO FACE.

NEVERTHELESS, I BROUGHT ALONG A **PLASMA RIFLE,** AS FORTUNE RARELY FAVORS THE OVERCONFIDENT.

WE'RE HERE.

ALL RIGHT. LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.

NO, TERCHAK.

I WON'T HAVE THE HUMAN TAINT THAT CLOUDS YOUR JUDGMENT RUINING OUR ATTACK.

THIS IS TOO IMPORTANT TO LET YOU RUN OFF HALF-COCKED. WE'LL DO THIS ***MY*** WAY.

I AM NOT ONE OF YOUR ACOLYTES ANYMORE YOU LOST YOUR RIGHT TO ORDER ME AROUND TWO CENTURIES AGO.

TRY NOT TO BE SUCH AN ***IDIOT*** FOR ONCE!

I'M GOING TO FLANK THEM AND ATTACK FROM ANOTHER ANGLE. DO ***NOT*** MAKE A MOVE UNTIL I STRIKE, UNDERSTAND?

THE TRUTH IS THAT EVEN AFTER ALL THIS TIME, HRUKKAN KNEW ME BETTER THAN MOST.

HE PLAYED ON MY RESENTMENT AND STUBBORN INDEPENDENCE, AND EVEN THOUGH IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE WAS PUSHING MY BUTTONS...

...I OBLIGINGLY TOOK THE BAIT.

DIE, MURDERERS!

CHOOM

CHOOM

CHOOM

THIS IS FOR MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS!

THIS IS FOR THE NEW FACE OF TCHARUN!

AND WHEN I STOPPED FIRING AND TOOK A LOOK AT WHAT I'D DONE, I KNEW THERE WAS ONLY ONE TASK LEFT TO ME...

TERCHAC... YOU MAKE IT *TOO EASY.*

EASILY *LED,* EASILY GOADED. YOU'VE LEARNED NOTHING SINCE THOSE HUMAN SOLDIERS USED YOU SO LONG AGO--

Eh?

CHRCHOK...?

NO...THIS ISN'T...

HOW?! HOW DID YOU *KNOW?!*

COME NOW, WEAPONSMASTER. THIS CAN'T BE SUCH A *SHOCK*.

IF YOU WERE *HALF* AS GOOD A TEACHER AS YOU *CLAIM* TO BE...

...YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TRAINED AN ACOLYTE TO BE HALF AS *STUPID* AS YOU THINK *I* AM.

OF COURSE I KNEW THIS WOULD BE A SET-UP.

HRUKKAN HAD BEEN TELLING HIS CONTACTS TO CAPTURE MY OWN KEY DISCIPLES AND BRING THEM TO THIS CLEARING...

...SO THAT I COULD BE TRICKED INTO KILLING THEM MYSELF.

INSTEAD, I WENT IN DELIBERATELY AIMING FOR HRUKKAN'S MEN, WHO WERE HIDDEN IN THE TREES.

HRUKKAN'S FURY UNBALANCED HIM. I PASSED UP SEVERAL OPENINGS, ALLOWING HIM TO REGAIN HIS FOCUS.

HE WAS LASHING OUT IN BLIND RAGE, LIKE A WOUNDED BEAST. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A **SIN** TO FINISH HIM OFF IN SUCH A SORRY STATE.

I WANT YOU TO KNOW, BEFORE YOU DIE, THAT I ***NEVER*** ABANDONED THE FAITH YOU TAUGHT ME.

THE SONG OF KHYALHTUA HAS GUIDED MY EVERY STEP.

I ***ACCEPTED*** YOUR HELP BECAUSE I ***KNEW*** I COULD COUNT ON YOUR TREACHERY.

⇒HUFF⇐...⇒HUFF⇐... ***WISE*** ARE WARRIORS... ⇒HUFF⇐...WHO CAN FIND...⇒HUFF⇐...RIVALS ***WORTHY***...⇒HUFF⇐... OF THEIR ***TRUST***...

NOW WHO'S THE TEACHER?

RRAHHH!

FINAL LESSON:

HKK

...TERCHAC. HEAR MY...FINAL CONFESSION...

YES, WEAPONSMASTER.

WHATEVER MAY HAVE PASSED BETWEEN US, NO SAURIAN WITH A SHRED OF HONOR WOULD IGNORE HIS VICTIM'S DYING WORDS.

I ***LOVED*** YOU ONCE... LIKE A ***SON***. I FELT BETRAYED... BY THE ***CHANGES*** IN YOU...

...BUT THAT IS NOT... WHY I HATE YOU. I WANT YOU ***DEAD*** BECAUSE...I HATE ***MYSELF***.

ALL THIS TIME I HAVE DENIED THE ***TRUTH*** THAT I KNEW IN MY HEARTS...

OVER THE DECADES...MY CONVICTION THAT SAURIANS ARE ***SUPERIOR*** TO HUMANS...GRADUALLY GAVE WAY TO THE REALIZATION...

...THAT WITHOUT THE ***SOFT...WEAK... TREACHEROUS*** MAMMAL SCUM...

...WE WOULD NEVER HAVE ***EVOLVED*** ENOUGH TO ***SURVIVE*** THIS WAR

EVENTUALLY, I TOOK HRUKKAN'S POST AS WEAPONSMASTER, AND EVEN THE SAURIAN ROYAL FAMILY ADOPTED THE SAME EVOLUTIONARY METHODS THAT I HAD BROUGHT HOME TO TCHARUN.

BUT TWO HUNDRED ORBITS LATER, HRUKKAN'S LAST WORDS OCCASIONALLY RISE TO TAUNT ME.

IF ONLY HE COULD HAVE LIVED TO SEE THE DAY WHEN THE WAR GODDESS HERSELF APPEARED BEFORE ME, AND GRANTED ME MY ***FINAL*** TRANSFORMATION.

WITH HER HOLY POWER COURSING THROUGH ME, I CUT THE HUMAN SOLDIERS DOWN LIKE GRASS. EVEN MY OLD NAME HAS BEEN CAST ASIDE LIKE A SKIN I'VE OUTGROWN.

WHAT NOW, LORD ***KHYRADON?***

OUR WORK HERE IS DONE, CAPTAIN CHARKI. TIME TO CRUSH THEIR NEXT OUTPOST.

WELL... ***THIS*** BRINGS BACK MEMORIES...

A *FLAMETHROWER*. I USED ONE OF THESE IN MY *FIRST* ENCOUNTER WITH THE HUMANS.

I THOUGHT AT THE TIME THAT IT WAS THE WORST MISTAKE OF MY LIFE, BUT IN FACT IT TAUGHT ME SOMETHING *VITAL*...

"...THE VERY SAME WISDOM I PASSED ON TO WEAPONSMASTER HRUKKAN AS HIS *FINAL LESSON*."

CAN YOU GUESS WHAT THAT LESSON WAS, CAPTAIN?

KLAK

I HAVE NO NEED TO *GUESS*, LORD KHYRADON. I RECITE IT EVERY TIME I RECEIVE COMMUNION...

"FROM OUR BITTEREST ENEMIES WE SEIZE OUR FINEST WEAPONS."

VERY GOOD, CAPTAIN. LET'S GO MAKE SURE THE REST OF HUMANITY LEARNS IT THE *HARD* WAY.

CROSSGEN PRIMER, A PROMOTIONAL ONE-SHOT RELEASED WITH *WIZARD #103*, FEATURED TEASERS AND CHARACTER INFORMATION FOR CROSSGEN'S FIRST FOUR TITLES: *SIGIL, MERIDIAN, MYSTIC* AND *SCION*.

JAM COVER BY **BRANDON PETERSON**, **JOHN DELL** & **ANDREW CROSSLEY**; **JOSHUA MIDDLETON**, **DEXTER VINES** & **MICHAEL ATIYEH**; **JIM CHEUNG**, **DON HILLSMAN II** & **CAESAR RODRIGUEZ**; AND **BEN LAI, RAY LAI** & **ANDREW CROSSLEY**

THE SKIES

above Tanipal are filled with the flash of sunlight on hardshell as spaceships fill the busy port city of Honna. Located on the rim of the fringe worlds, Tanipal is possibly the only winner in the ongoing Human/Saurian wars because it draws wealth from the recreation of both sides. Situated in a strategically important spot midway between the human and Saurian homeworlds, Tanipal hosts a steady stream of diplomatic envoys from both sides without ever taking a side of its own.

The Sultan of Tanipal, Ronolo, rules with one eye roving the crowd for fresh faces for his amusement. Thirteen of his wives are legal acquisitions, sent by their families in exchange for the Sultan's favors. The rest are short-term rentals, kept only until Ronolo is bored. Although canny enough to play the humans and the Saurians against each other, Ronolo is primarily concerned with his own amusement.

What draws visitors to Tanipal is Honna's extra-legal market of vices and goods, the twilight economy that supports free-lancers like Samandahl Rey and Roiya Sintor. Anything can be found here, from equipment to entertainment; just name your price and take your chances.

Lurking on the fringes are the Saurians. Although an armed truce exists between the two species, small skirmishes break out on a regular basis because of the natural antipathy between the two races. The Saurs believe the humans to be a lesser species, and the humans think the same, although merchants on both sides find ways to meet in the middle.

It's a fragile balance, and anything could destroy the equilibrium. So when a human becomes more than human…

SIGIL SECTION FROM *CROSSGEN PRIMER*
BY **BARBARA KESEL**, **BEN LAI**, **RAY LAI** & **ANDREW CROSSLEY**

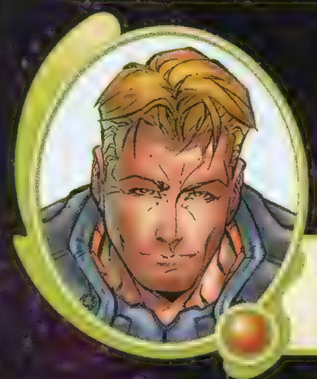
SIGIL

Samandahl Rey

A veteran of the Human/Saurian wars, Sam and fellow ex-soldier Roiya are in the business of getting by on the fringe worlds, outside the growing sphere of influence of their old enemies, the Saurians. Sam's a gambler and has managed a cheat or two over time, but never when it would really hurt the other guy.

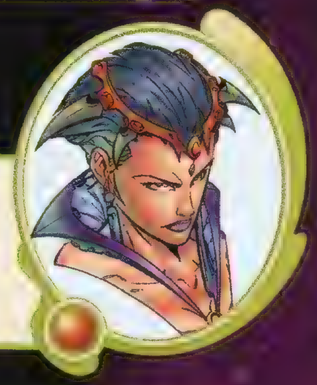
Roiya Sintor

Roiya's the people person, and she's landed them the freelance security jobs that bring in the legit money. She's also the conscience of the team; the one most likely to lead them in the right direction.



JeMerik Meer

A charming rogue with a checkered past, Jemerik floats from world to world in search of the next adventure.



Zanniati

The stowaway with an imperial secret, Zanni joins the team after determining that Sam is her best bet for escaping her current situation.

Tchlusarud

A Saurian prince (but the younger offspring, not the inheritor) with a deep hatred of Sam, "Loser" lives for the day when he can have Sam's head on a stick.

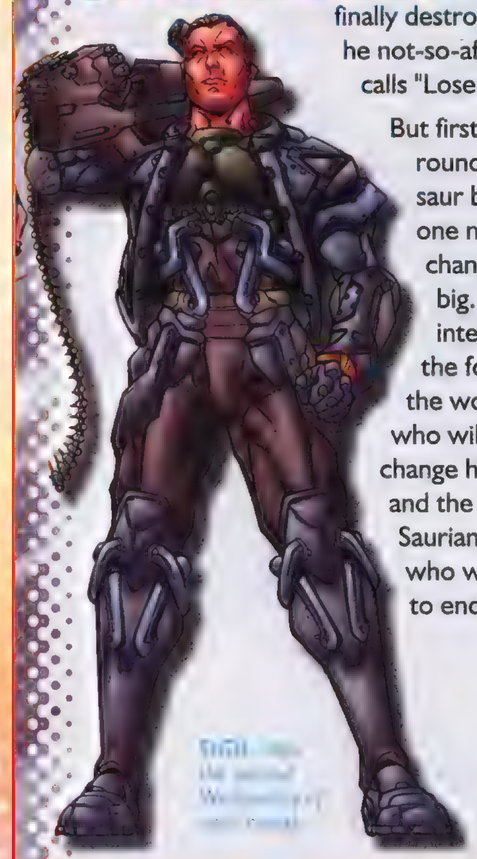
the unwilling hero

Tanipal is a world of chances. Samandahl Rey is working on his second. He was a loyal soldier, fighting the Saurians for the five-world Planetary Union before being cut loose during a wave of budget cuts without even a "thank you." He and fellow soldier Roiya Sintor have been just getting by; the long-standing war between the humans and the Saurians has left both sides with little left to spare and nothing in the way of pensions for ex-soldiers. Their best hope is temporary employment as security for Tanipal's Sultan.

Sam's a great soldier, but not what you'd call a hero. His goals are small; to get through the day with a little more than he had yesterday. He has amazing luck, which he'd rather trust to turn his way than go out of his way to work hard. He won't cheat, but he doesn't mind bending the rules to his side when possible. His only long-term goal is to meet up with Tchlusarud again someday and finally destroy the Saurian he not-so-affectionately calls "Loser."

'Sam's a great soldier, but not what you'd call a hero.'

But first, one more round of Pseudo-saur battle, and one more chance to win big. But Fate intervenes in the form of the woman who will change his life and the Saurians who want to end it...



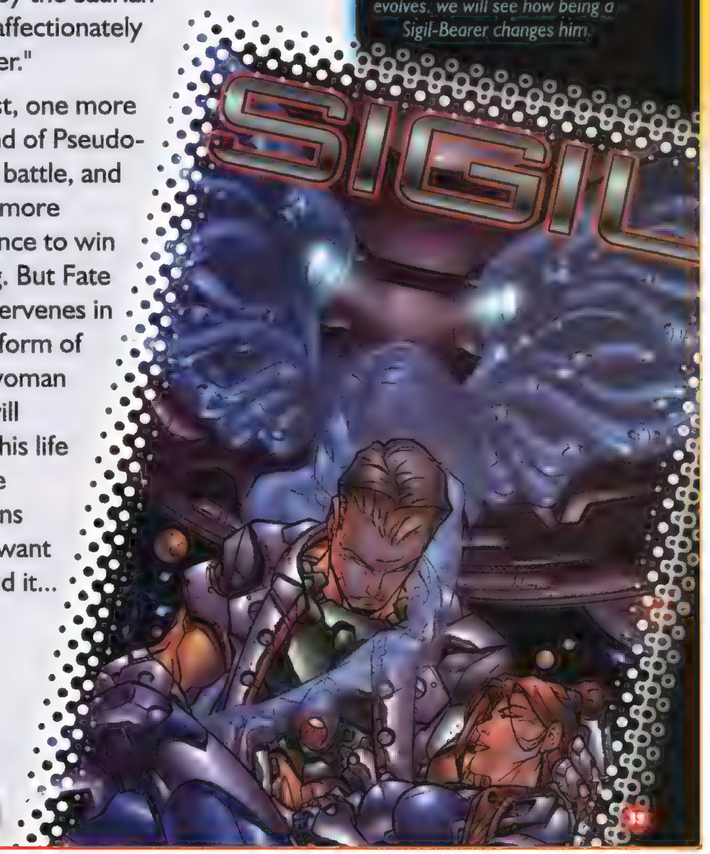
FAQs from www.crossgen.com

How is 'Sigil' pronounced?
Rhymes with VIGIL with a hard 'G' as in 'edge'

What does Sigil mean?
It's another word for symbol, or sign. In our universe, it's the name for the mark that mysteriously shows up on certain characters. These Sigil-Bearers have been given a link to a source of universal power that gives them amazing new abilities.

Where did the Saurians come from?
They evolved separately from the humans. The two species met for the first time less than a century ago, and have never gotten along well.

Why does Sam deserve to be a Sigil-Bearer?
It's not a matter of deserving. For reasons beyond our comprehension, certain individuals were chosen to receive a link to the source of universal power. As Sam evolves, we will see how being a Sigil-Bearer changes him.



THE FIRST TWO PAGES OF *CROSSGENESIS #1*'S *SIGIL* SECTION WERE RECOLORED FOR *SIGIL #1*'S PROLOGUE, AND THE LAST TWO PAGES WERE SKIPPED ENTIRELY.

HERE... ANOTHER PLACE. ONE WITH UNTAPPED POTENTIAL EAGERLY AWAITING A FOCUS.

A shame that no one here has touched the nature of the mysteries of the Whole before now. The lives of these people must be so very plain.

THEY'RE ON THE EDGES OF AN INTERSTELLAR WAR. I DON'T THINK THEY HAVE THE LEISURE TO PROPERLY APPRECIATE THEIR BOREDOM.

At least they understand the nature of conflict. That's half the battle.

IN *CROSSGENESIS #1*, THE MYSTERIOUS BEINGS WHO CREATED THE SIGILS VIEW THE WORLDS OF *SIGIL*, *MERIDIAN*, *MYSTIC* AND *SCION*. THIS PROMOTIONAL STORY WAS REPURPOSED INTO SHORT PROLOGUES THAT RAN IN THE FIRST ISSUE OF EACH TITLE.

IT'S ONLY A GAME TO YOU; IT'S A DEADLY WAR TO THEM.

Once life is not a game, it's all over... and don't think I don't see yours at work: you want to lead me to your way of thinking.

IF I COULD ONLY THINK OF A WAY.

For you to outthink me? didn't I create you? ALL OF THIS?

Come, Let me lead *you* now.

SIGIL

SKETCHBOOK

SIGIL PINUP FROM
CROSSGENESIS #1
BY **BEN LAI** & **RAY LAI**

SIGIL™ CREATIVE TEAM

A former drama major, Barbara has been in the comic book industry since 1981, when she wrote a Batgirl backup story for Detective Comics while sitting in a tech booth monitoring a college play. Since then she has written for every major comic company as well as served as an editor at DC Comics and worked on almost every DC title including Watchmen, and developed the DC/TSR line. She then moved on to Dark Horse Comics where she served as editor, then managing editor, and finally as liaison to the Legends line. Somewhere in all this she found time to marry the love of her life Karl, do charity work, head fundraisers, and co-publish her local community newspaper. Now she'll just be responsible for training new writers and maintaining continuity as well as writing the stories that will appear in the titles Sigil and Meridian. Should be a breeze. That one's for the boys in her life, Brian and Temor.

Born in Hong Kong and raised in Montreal, brothers Ben and Ray Lai come to CrossGen Comics to [illegible] the title Sigil, after honing their skills as graphic designers, working on projects they planned to self-publish. The hard working brothers have been drawing comics for only [illegible], but have already shown the talent and maturity of two seasoned veterans. [illegible] it wasn't just their love of [illegible] that brought them to the medium. Both had a [illegible] experience and it was [illegible] art that [illegible]. [illegible] to learn all [illegible] of comic [illegible] the brothers work as a [illegible] with both of them skilled [illegible] inking [illegible]. The brothers feel [illegible] talents can make a [illegible] recognized [illegible]. They want [illegible] standard for [illegible] play is also a [illegible] player while [illegible], well... just Ben. They would [illegible] to dedicate Sigil [illegible].

[illegible] and his new wife Marisol to CrossGen from da Bronx. He spent the past four [illegible] as part of [illegible] Paintbrush, working for such companies as Marvel, DC, Event, [illegible] and Acclaim. He has credits in such titles as Painkiller Jane, Insane Clown Posse, and [illegible], and his work has appeared in Amazing Spider-Man, Superboy, and Purgatori. [illegible] he has also done a bit of lettering, lending his skills to the pages of X-O [illegible] and [illegible] Warrior for Acclaim. Wil is a huge fan of Frank Miller and The Matrix, [illegible] of which will help in any way with his new job as colorist on the title Sigil, but we thought we'd [illegible] them anyway. Wil sends this one out to Marisol, his one and only

Dave's professional career began in 1985 when he joined two California newspapers to draw their illustrations and cartoons. Three of his cartoons won collegiate and California editorial cartooning awards. In 1990, he broke into comics as a letterer. In 1993, he joined Malibu as an in-house artist, lettering and inking on dozens of titles. In 1994, he joined Comicraft and designed logos, drew fonts, developed lettering styles and lettered approximately 17,000 pages on many popular comics. Dave dedicates this CrossGen book to his loving family: "My Mom for being such an inspirational artist, Dad for being my fan, Tera for her friendship and humor, my wife Natalie for her unflagging energy and support, and Grandma Terri for reassuring me that joining CrossGen was a good idea... without her advice, I might never have moved cross-country, and Natalie and I may never have met!"

CREATOR BIOGRAPHIES FROM *SIGIL #2*

It's been four centuries since the first contact between humans and Saurians. Attempts were made to establish a peaceful coexistence, but the hatred between the two races started a grueling war that's destroying both sides.

The population controls on Gaia are so tight that the Planetary Union Army is the only option for a young Samandahl Rey. He's a good soldier, surviving mission after mission, even the ones he wasn't supposed to...

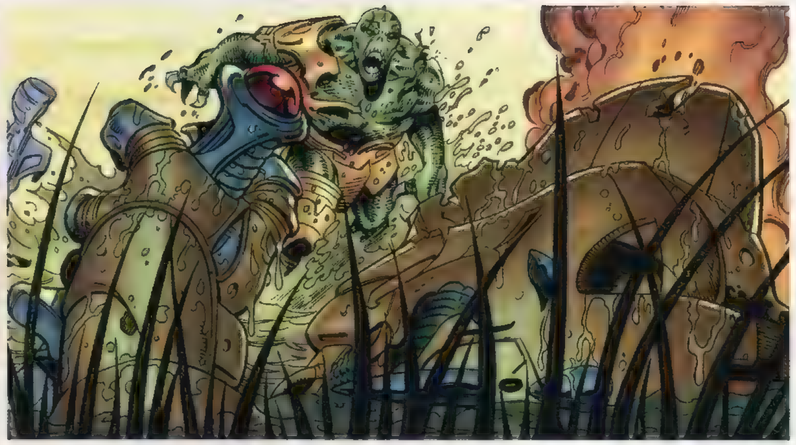
...because surviving is what he does best.

Sam's friends are few. His closest one is Roiya Sintor, a fellow soldier who befriended Sam because he reminds her of her brother Temor, killed in a Saurian attack on Gaia.

There's an enemy: Tchlusarud, whom Sam has derisively tagged "Loser," a Saurian prince whose rite of first blood was disrupted by Sam's squad. In trying to kill Sam, Tchlusarud was responsible for his own brother's death. In Tchlusarud's mind, his honor can only be salvaged by *Sam's* death.

There have been girls: Carynne, the one who broke Sam's heart; Alisse, the

CROSSGEN ILLUSTRATED WAS AN ART BOOK WITH CHAPTERS SPOTLIGHTING EACH CROSSGEN TITLE.
SIGIL SECTION COMMENTARY



one looking for a hero; and Maire, who only wanted a pilot.

Then there's a surprise: budget cuts. Sam and Roiya are out of the Army and making a living as best they can. Their travels bring them to Tanipal, the gaming world, which hosts every kind of pleasure game. Some are legal, others are tolerated.

Meanwhile, Tchlusarud and Tanipal's Sultan negotiate. Sultan Ronolo may be human, but he's not above playing both species against each other. But Ronolo has a problem: one of his thirteen wives has disappeared. Tanipal is shut down to find her.

Tchlusarud's there for another reason, as well: he knows Sam's on Tanipal. A Saurian commando team attacks, and in the melee...

...Roiya is mortally wounded.

Sam isn't there to cover her because he's pinned by a strange orange-eyed Saurian who brands his chest with a sigil. Breaking away, Sam rushes Roiya back to his ship, joined by a runaway security guard and a shrouded woman who turn out to be JeMerik Meer and Ronolo's missing wife Zanniati. Sam frantically tries to save Roiya's life only to have her die in his arms...

...or so he thinks.

Sam's grief explodes through his sigil in a fury of power that bursts across Tanipal. In the resulting chaos, a lone ship leaves orbit. Sam's ship. The *BitterLuck*.

Only Sam's not driving. He's out cold.

When Sam wakes up, he races to confront the strangers on his bridge. The woman, it turns out, is a starship pilot. The orange-eyed man is evasive about his reason for abandoning his guard post...and the voice coming from the ship is familiar. *Roiya*. Her body lies in a cryogenic chamber, but her essence has been merged with the ship. But there's little time for explanations...

...because everybody in the galaxy is after them.

The Tanipali guards want them because they jumped planet during lockdown; the Planetary Union fighters are after them because they think Sam has an unlicensed weapon; and Tchlusarud's Saurian forces want Sam because of what happened years ago.

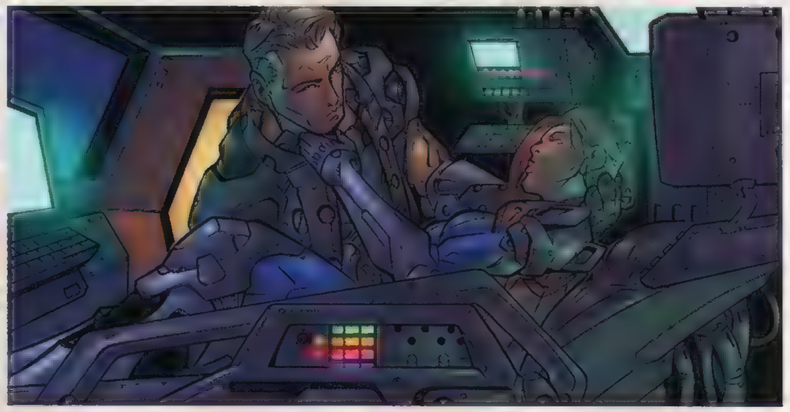
While trying to corral a stowaway pseudosaur, Sam discovers he can force a change to any non-biological matter he touches. Outside, Loser's Saurians have outraced the competition and are trying to cripple the *BitterLuck*. Sam forces his way onto Loser's royal battle cruiser, but just when it looks like fist will meet talons, Sam fades away...

...transported to another spaceship by Trenin of the First, who has come to investigate this strange Sigil-Bearer. As Trenin tests Sam, the situation reverses — Sam finds himself stealing Trenin's power. The god disappears, leaving Sam in possession of the god's ship...

...because Trenin can't track Sam, but he *can* track his ship.

Back on the *BitterLuck*, the Saurians board, and Zanni finds herself in Tchlusarud's clutches. Zanni and JeMerik are taken separately to Tcharun, the Saurian homeworld.

The ship housing Roiya is held in an orbiting space station, being taken apart by Saurian techs. Zanni's a "guest" of Loser, who demonstrates that escapees will be eaten by the local carnivores, and JeMerik's showing a remarkable resistance to being killed.



In Trenin's ship, a technological marvel, Sam is able to waltz past the Saurians' security and set Roiya free...after the surprise revelation that he can survive in vacuum. With Roiya safely hidden behind a nearby moon, Sam heads for the surface to rescue Zanni.

JeMerik commandeers a monster and frees Zanni. They survive a hail of bullets, although Zanni, noting the holes in JeMerik's jacket, wonders if *he* was ever in danger. Sam arrives and is overjoyed to see the two of them (well, actually, just Zanni) alive and

unharmed. Hearing that Loser is nearby, Sam can't resist the opportunity to finish off his enemy.

It's been ten years since their first encounter, but this time the advantage lies with the human. It looks like Sam may finally defeat Tchlusarud, but Zanni and JeMerik arrive to help him, and Sam aborts his revenge when Zanni's life is endangered.

But Roiya wasn't hidden at all. When Sam escapes, Loser gives the kill order for the *BitterLuck* — with it, *Roiya*. Sam's ship, as great as it is, can't stop time. There's only one chance.

JeMerik's furious. He's the one who saved Roiya, he loves her, and he won't let her die. He takes the controls, pushing the ship to perform beyond its specs, and tells Sam to use his power as he rams the wounded *BitterLuck*. Sam morphs both ships into one, and Roiya is saved.

She's a hologram, but alive.

The crew decides to go to Delassia, Zanni's homeworld. What Zanni hasn't told them is that she's bringing home secret recordings of the Sultan. When they get there, Sam's offered a deal: if he will stay and help Delassia, they'll give him anything. *Anything*.

Sam decides to stay, but not because of anything he's given. Because he's *needed*. While Sam works on urban renewal, Roiya, under JeMerik's supervision, navigates the databanks of their ship to deliver plans for a souped-up warp drive. This, along with Zanni's recordings, gives Delassia a tactical advantage. Zanni will go to Gaia as Delassia's new representative.

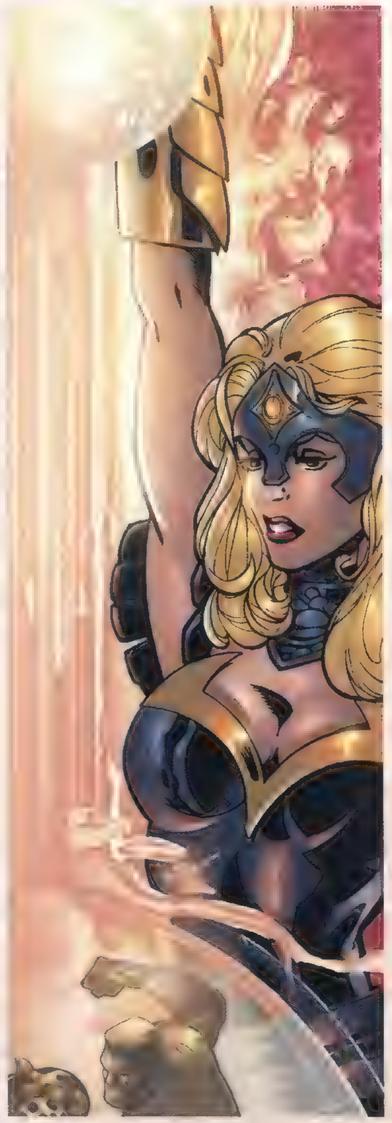
Back on Delassia, the Saurians attack en masse while the Sultan heads a small Black Ops force to kill Zanniati. He fails, but escapes in the *BitterLuck* (taking Roiya's body with him) to pursue Zanni.

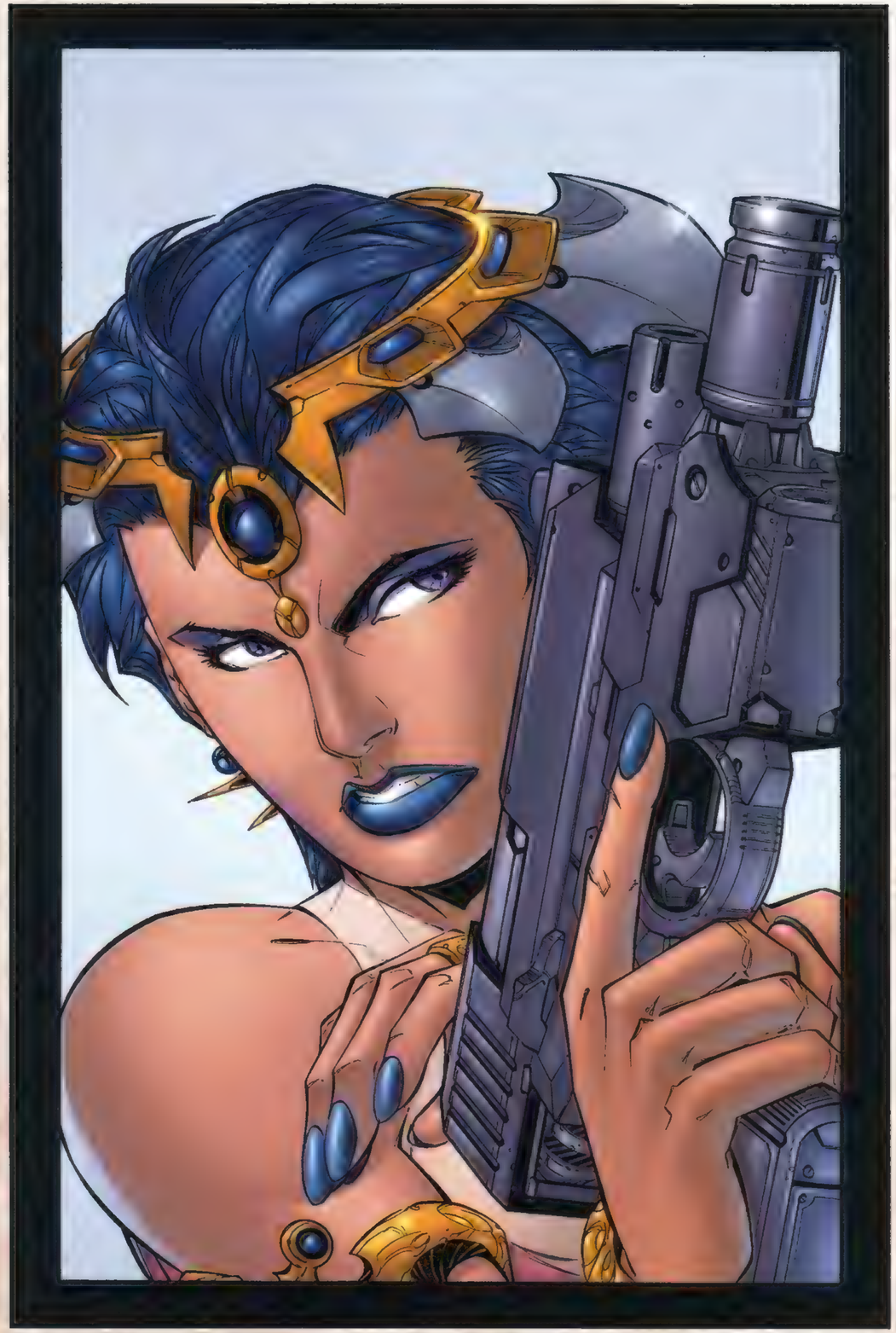
As Sam thwarts the Saurian attack, a Saurian ship lands with Loser inside. Sam's greatest enemy has come to him for help because the Saurian Weaponsmaster has been touched by the power of the goddess Khyalthua (Yala of the First in disguise) and the newly-named Khyradon has overthrown the royal family. Tchlusarud wants the madman stopped and is asking for Sam's help because Khyradon's first target is Delassia.

Using Loser's ship — the only one left intact — Sam manages to save both Zanni and Roiya with a brilliant bit of misdirection. Ronolo again escapes and heads for Gaia.

Since Sam and company are in a Saurian ship, their getting to Gaia means fighting through the Planetary Union fleet alerted to the presence of a Saurian ship by Ronolo. Easy work for Sam, who reluctantly decimates the fleet to give the others enough time to expose the truth about the Sultan's duplicity. Ronolo tries to kill the Union president, but Sam is able to save him. In the excitement, the Sultan escapes again...

...and *Sam* is made Commander of the Union Army.





ZANNIATI UNDERCOVER

Zanniati, the only child of the co-presidents of Delassia, the Planetary Union's poorest world, was born to a life of relative privilege. But there's a wild gene inside her that craves more than a worldwide ship-repair facility can offer.

The only excitement there comes from flight, and Zanni's among the best pilots Delassia has ever seen. She wants more.

That opportunity came when Sultan Ronolo of Tanipal sent a proposal of marriage and a healthy bride price. Ronolo also promised a mining partnership to help Delassia's flagging economy. Tanipal was an exciting place. Zanni leaped at the chance.

But in the ten months she was there she was secluded and abused and her only excitement came from her possession of proof both of Ronolo's collusion with the Saurians and the secret of Saurian evolution. She had to get back to Delassia.

Samandahl Rey started as her ticket off Tanipal. Soon she saw him, Roiya and JeMerik as her chance to change her world. They became her friends, and Sam much, much more...

Far Left and Above
pencils: Ben Lai
inks: Ray Lai
colors: Wil Quintana

Zanniati takes a stand.

Left
pencils: Ben Lai
inks: Ray Lai

The Saurian battle cruiser *Makruthte*.

Left and Next Page
pencils: Kevin Sharpe
inks: Randy Elliott
colors: Wil Quintana

Tchlusarud kneels before his mother, the Saurian Matriarch.

ADAPT OR DIE

The Saurians are a survivor race. Their present form is an amalgam of genetic manipulation by their own scientists and the result of a unique evolutionary survival mechanism: the Saurians can obtain new genetic material from ingested flesh. They also absorb stored memory data from what they eat.

If they *eat* you, they *become* you.

This genetic adaptation was unknown to them until their scientists studied Terchac, the first Saurian to ingest human flesh. Terchac almost immediately replicated his victim's neurological quirks. The Saurians were aware of the genetic ties between their own and every other species on Tcharun, but were unaware of where the connection came from until then. What they discovered through Terchac's actions became a closely guarded secret. Human flesh became a luxury commodity, strictly controlled...

...a vital part of the Saurians' breeding program.

While the Saurians cling stubbornly to their swampy home, the humans have multiplied and colonized five other worlds. If they are to surpass the human race, the Saurians must first become more like them. Consequently, the Saurians have their eye on Brejhur and Kayseecay, the only two of the human worlds that can support Saurian life.

Tchlusarud has been authorized by the Matriarch to conspire with the Sultan Ronolo to obtain them.

Between ingesting humans, and the fact that they live longer and have less need for sleep than their enemies, the Saurians have made great strides in scientific knowledge. The study of surface tension led them to develop force-field technologies. The addition of the humans' knowledge led to their development of the ARC drive, a faster-than-light propulsion system that gives them the technological upper hand in the neverending war.

But the new weapon demonstrated by Samandahl Rey has them stymied. By all their research, such a weapon should not exist. Even when they discover the weapon is Rey himself, that doesn't stop them from trying to replicate its effects.

If they keep eating, they believe, they will soon discover just how.

Above and Right
pencils: Scot Eaton
inks: Andrew Hennessy
colors: Wil Quintana

The Sultan Ronolo of Tanipal.

Left and Top Next Page
pencils: Scot Eaton
inks: Andrew Hennessy
colors: Wil Quintana

The Sultan Ronolo meets privately with Prince Tchlusarud of Tcharun.

TANIPAL: PLAYING BOTH SIDES

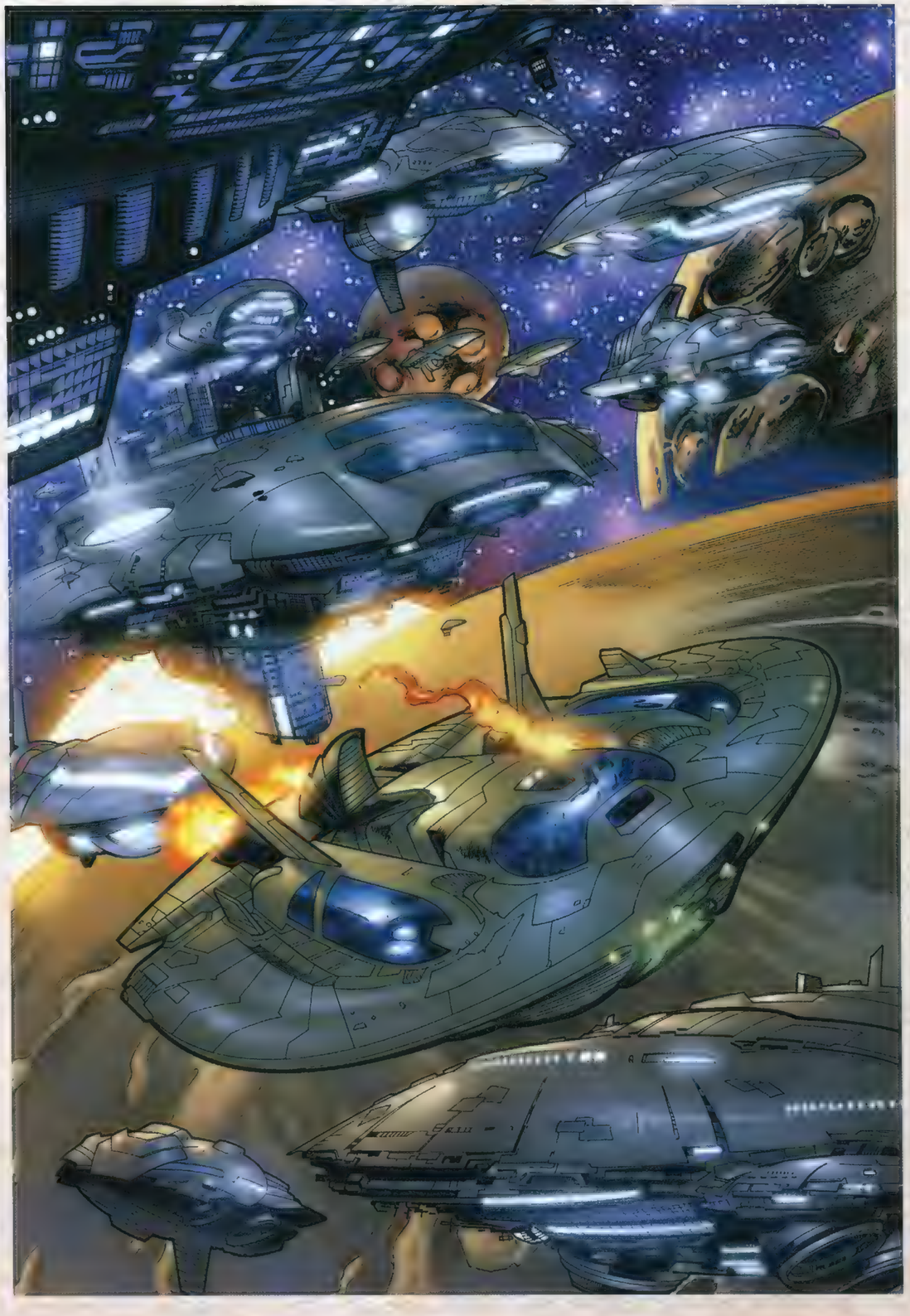
Just a barren rock in the middle of nowhere, the world of Tanipal was deeded as a joke to a madman who declared himself a monarch. He called himself the Sultan of Tanipal and after contact was made with the Saurians he transformed his world into the most valuable real estate in the galaxy. Because Tanipal happens to be midway between human and Saurian territories. It became an oasis, providing something that both armies needed in the middle of the Human/Saurian war: entertainment.

Like pseudosaur combat — a lethal test of skill outlawed on most planets. Each player enters rapport with a tiny armored carnivore outfitted with a kill-pac neural stimulator that overrides any self-protective instincts. The object is to be the last survivor. If the operator does not cut contact with his pseudosaur before death, the gamer, too, will die. It's a risky game played by people who love the risk...or the winner's purse.

As the money flowed in, legitimacy followed. The Planetary Union was forced to accept the sovereignty of Tanipal's Sultanate and they established an embassy in the royal city of Honna.

The Sultan Ronolo knows that both sides want his planet, and is playing them against each other.

A wily hedonist, on the surface Ronolo is charming and personable, but his wives all know his true nature...they bear the scars of his wrath.



Right
pencils: Scot Eaton
inks: Andrew Hennessy
colors: Wil Quintana

The Planetary Union fleet surrounds a Saurian invader.

Left and Above
pencils: Scot Eaton
inks: Andrew Hennessy
colors: Wil Quintana

The Planetary Union Representative from Delassia, Zanniati Oribatta.

SAMANDAHL REX: THE MOST POWERFUL SIGIL-BEARER

"You will find them, gather them, and lead them."

Sam's been given a powerful directive. Whatever mysterious force granted him access to the universal energies through the sigil also gave him a mission. He just doesn't know what it is.

The amount of energy a Sigil-Bearer, a First, or an Atlantean can wield and store differs depending on their personality and will, just as, though all people share common genes, some are stronger and others smarter.

The abilities Sam has shown are just the tip of the iceberg. He has huge potential and he lives in a place rich in untapped potential. How far can he go?

And how far will his *son* go?

Right and Next Page
pencils: Scot Eaton
inks: Andrew Hennessy
colors: Wil Quintana

The Horned God and Sigil-Bearer Brath Mac Garen.

STUDIO INSIGHTS

Written by: CrossGen's guest writer, Jen Contino

The Sigil isn't just the red and yellow (or orange) mark on some of the members of the CrossGen Universe, it's also the name of one of the core titles. Making this SIGIL shine monthly is the talented artistic team of penciler Scot Eaton, inker Andrew Hennessy, and colorist Wil Quintana.

"Sam's plight is compelling," says Eaton. "He's a reluctant hero trying to fulfill this destiny that he doesn't really want, but now he can't turn away from."

Along with the powerful motivation behind the protagonist, SIGIL's also got an outstanding art team that isn't afraid of a challenge and is looking forward to the chance to really show off their stuff. "We don't have a lot of limits or constraints with SIGIL," says Quintana. "It's sci-fi so there aren't set ways about its expression or presentation. It's like making an epic film without the constraints of a budget."

"There is an enormous amount of visual depth in the book that we haven't even tapped yet," enthuses Hennessy. "For instance, we're trying to flesh out the Saurian race and some of the other aliens within this series as well as some of the vehicles."

Eaton elaborates, "We're designing new ships and trying to standardize them so you can easily recognize ships by class and status: destroyers, fighters, ambassadors, space station, etc. I want them to be distinct." To the extent of making creatures and crafts more recognizable, Eaton embellished the former enemy, now ally, Loser, a little more so that his visage wasn't just your average run-of-the-mill Saurian. Loser's redesign was just the beginning.

"Collaboratively, we're trying to expand on all the characters and definitely give them individual looks while maintaining their connections to the team or race," adds Quintana. "As far as designs, you'll see similarities in costumes, yet individual tastes will definitely become known."

Another definite is the amount of action this series will see this year. So many cool events are on the horizon and tons of challenges await Sam and friends – Roiya, JeMerik, Zanniati, and Loser. "In the past, SIGIL might have been 'what you see is what you get', but that's not the case with the present and the future!" promises Hennessy. "Now you can expect the unexpected."

"Chuck [Dixon] wants to reveal more of the army and war history in SIGIL," says Quintana. "I can't wait to see that and some ramifications of the present conflict."

"There's just so much going on this year," comments Eaton. "We're keeping Loser as an ally – a lot of people thought he would go back to his 'evil' ways, but we liked these new dynamics between Loser and Sam, as well as the other heroes. Also, as a result of the war, worlds will live and die. Rumor has it that Gaia might be one of the first to hear the death knell. Roiya is also supposed to get her body back, but it will be different than what people are expecting and horrible in a lot of ways!"

Hennessy is quick to add, "The Weaponsmaster is also going to be defeated, but his defeat comes at a terrible price!"

Don't worry if you're thinking there won't be enough challenges for Sam to face this year. "One of the biggest things they will face this year might not be a person, but a place," says Quintana. "The single most dangerous place in existence, a planet where everything feeds on everything else!"

CHUCK DIXON

IN SIGHTS

Conducted by CrossGen's guest interviewer: Jen Contino

All the best elements of your favorite sci-fi books, movies, and comics are all rolled into one neat package with SIGIL – along with some surprises you'd never expect. Chuck Dixon and team are just waiting to leave their mark on SIGIL.

CROSSGEN: How is your vision for the series going to expand upon ideas introduced these past few years?

DIXON: I'm gonna take all that came before and BLOW IT UP! This war's been brewing and kind of stalemated. All that changes when I come on board. The war heats up in a huge way and billions die. True intergalactic warfare like it's never been done in comics. With Scot Eaton on the art end I'd be a fool not to go huge. We'll also be exploring other worlds and other cultures and destroying them. And more gadgets and technology. I haven't played with a sci-fi concept since Alien Legion and I am DYING to get deep into this one.

CROSSGEN: What do you like the best about working on SIGIL?

DIXON: The art crew are great guys; Scot, Andrew and Wil are a kick to work with. They'd be my team of choice were I assigned a space opera. And that's what this is. SIGIL is Starship Troopers meets Predator on the Planet of the Apes, and we're going all the way.

CROSSGEN: So is now the perfect time for new readers to check this series out?

DIXON: Absolutely! With this first issue I briskly re-cap the characters and relationships as the action rolls along. It's the beginning of a huge arc on the human/Saurian war. Best time to jump on is NOW.

CROSSGEN: What does keeping Loser as an ally add to the dynamics of this story?

DIXON: I love the respect/hate relationship between Sam and Loser. Also, with Loser and his mom (love that concept!) as regular players, the Saurian bad guys don't become ciphers or straw men. We get to know their culture and where they're coming from before we slaughter them by the bushel-load.

CROSSGEN: Fans have been wondering since the second issue if Roiya would ever get her body back. When might this even happen and how will it affect the series?

DIXON: As I've often said, "I used to torment my characters but now I torment my readers." This particular storyline is gonna have so many twists in it I'll have readers cursing me under their breath for making them wait thirty days for each resolution. Much of this takes off from a suggestion from Mark Waid but I'm gonna torque it beyond all recognition.

CROSSGEN: After a conflict with the Weaponsmaster, what's next for SIGIL?

DIXON: The near-destruction of Gaia, the intro of a new bad guy, intergalactic war on a huge scale, big doings on the Saurian homeworld and Zanni gets her revenge.

CROSSGEN: What other CrossGen Universe projects are you working on?

DIXON: I'm doing CRUX with the astounding Steve Epting, Rick Magyar, and Frank D'Armata, and that book takes a bold new course as events that have been under the surface for the first twelve issues explode. And WAY OF THE RAT, a martial arts epic by me, Jeff Johnson, Tom Ryder, and Chris Garcia. You can't be the coolest kid on your block unless you buy the first issue of this in May. A book that you should be on the ground floor of or your life will be a meaningless existence.

SIGIL™

SCOT EATON on SIGIL®

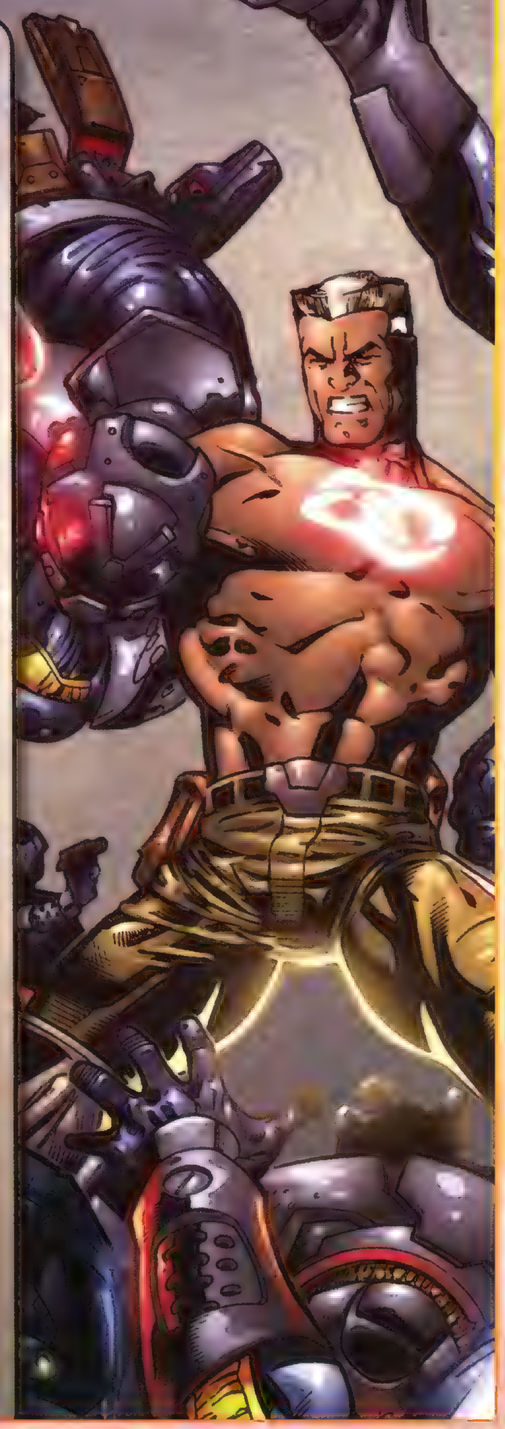
A lot of my approach to comics comes from the old pulp heroes of the '20s and '30s, especially Doc Savage. To me, Doc Savage embodies the concept of rugged individualism, and he has all the fundamental traits of a great comic book character.

I guess Doc Savage has found its way into SIGIL through my interpretation of the main character. Sam's got a crew cut, because it's a cool look – an iconic look. He goes around in a vest (which has the added advantage of making his sigil visible). No jodphers, but the rugged boots are there. And of course Sam is physically rugged and all built up – just like Doc Savage, whick works because it's a style, not a costume.

I think a hero has to draw your attention and stand out from the rest of the cast, but, as far as Sam's motivation, I'm often thinking of Bruce Willis in *Die Hard* or Harrison Ford in *Indiana Jones*. Sam's major strength is not that he's bulletproof or incredibly strong or invulnerable. It's that he's determined in a blue collar way. He'll take a beating, but he'll get back up every time. He's not relentless so much as stubborn. There's a humanity in him, even though he's got all these godlike powers. We want you to root for him, but we don't want you to think that it's inevitable that he's going to triumph. That's what makes Sam interesting to me – his vulnerability. You don't want to see him get kicked down, but you certainly want to see him get up.

My take on Sam affects my whole approach to SIGIL. For one thing, it's not over the top. You have to relate to Sam. You have to be able to connect. So my approach is fairly realistic in terms of style. And, although you don't see it, I think my biggest single influence is Frank Frazetta.

With Frazetta, it's all about the action – the tension in the bodies, the strain on the faces, the hair flying. And, if you think about it, it's almost always regular guys against incredible obstacles. If you distill all of Frazetta's work down to a single concept, I think it is stubbornness. That's what he puts in the figures, and that's what I want to instill in Sam.



When I sit down to draw Sigil, I look at the script as stage direction. I read the dialogue and examine my own take on the character, then I begin the process by drawing very, very small.

In the first step, I work on a tiny thumbnail, very often right on the script itself, where I'll work out page layouts. We're talking maybe two inches high. That's where I set the composition. And if I hit a winner, I know it.

I rework the thumbnail onto a little template that's about 50% of the original art size (11" x 17"), which is only a little smaller than the final printed page the reader will see. That lets me look through the reader's eyes. I start with underdrawings, which are basically stick figures that you build up from the inside out. You want to take the time to build up your underdrawings, because that keeps the art lifelike, so that you end up looking into a real event as opposed to a two-dimensional drawing.

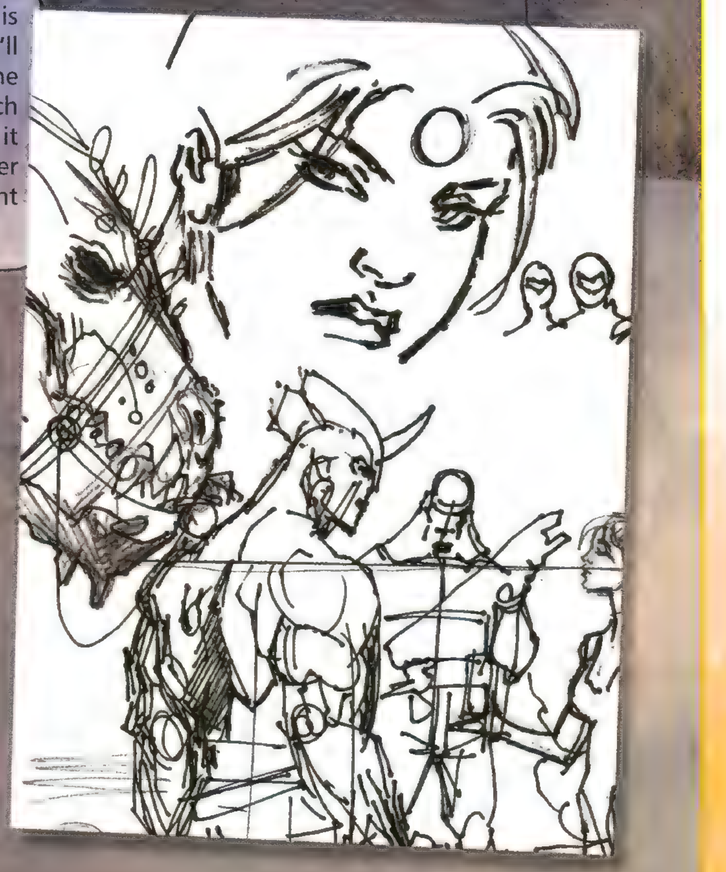
I work the half-size rough and work it up pretty tightly – building up from stick figures, working out perspective, deciding if I need reference for establishing shots – and I end up with a pretty rough comic book page. Now here's where it gets interesting…

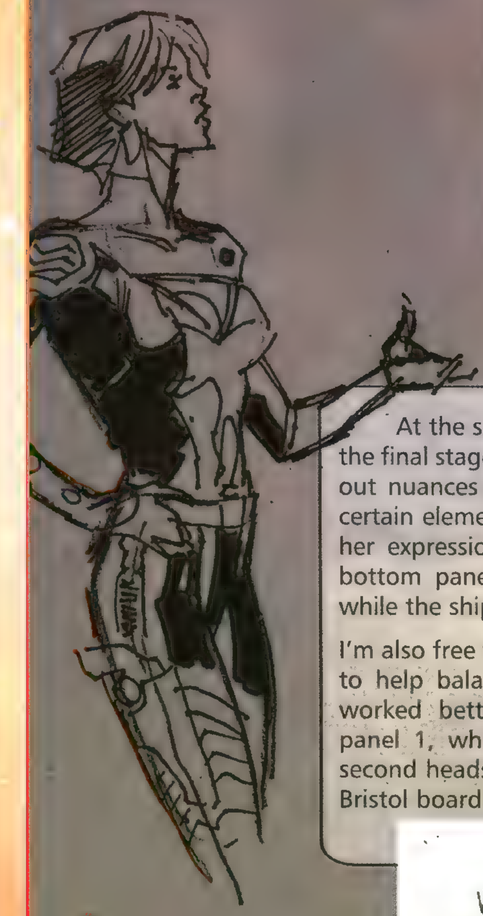
SCOT EATON'S ART PROCESS WAS FEATURED AS AN EXTRA IN *SIGIL VOL. 3: THE LIZARD GOD TPB*.

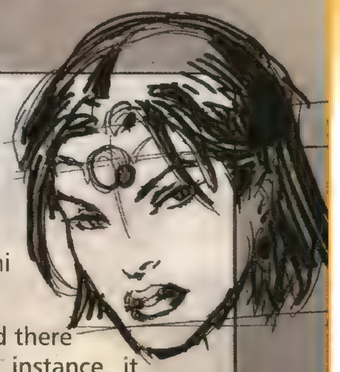
I take the half-sized rough, and I flip it. I flip it over, and I start drawing over the figures I've just roughed out on the other side. The reason I flip the page is that a lot of times, when you're sketching a page, things will drift to the right (assuming you're right handed). For instance, the eye on the right side of a face will be tipped up to the right. So by flipping the page and tightening up you can easily balance everything else. It's the same thing that many artists do when they hold their art up to a mirror, which is another technique to see if there are any things that are off-balance.

Anyway, at the flipped stage I work the characters over one more time, so they're really tightly drawn, with a lot of detail. At this stage they look very much like they will appear in the final printed version. I tighten up the backgrounds, so I know what things will look like. Buildings might start to look like buildings, and you can begin to pick out trees.

At this point, if the half-sized page is pretty tight, and I'm happy with it, I'll blow it up on a copier by 200%. The art on that copy is now 11x17, which is the size we work from. I flip it again, so the figures are no longer reversed, and I place it on the light box and start laying in the detail.

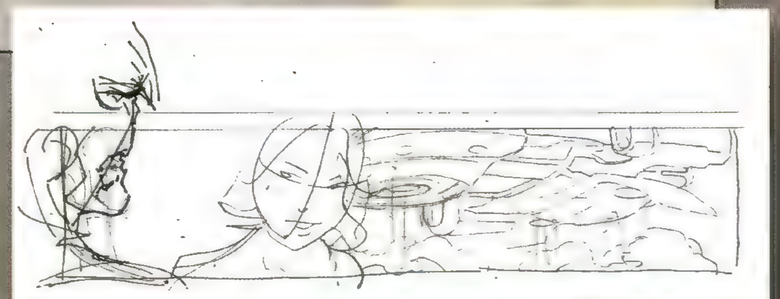




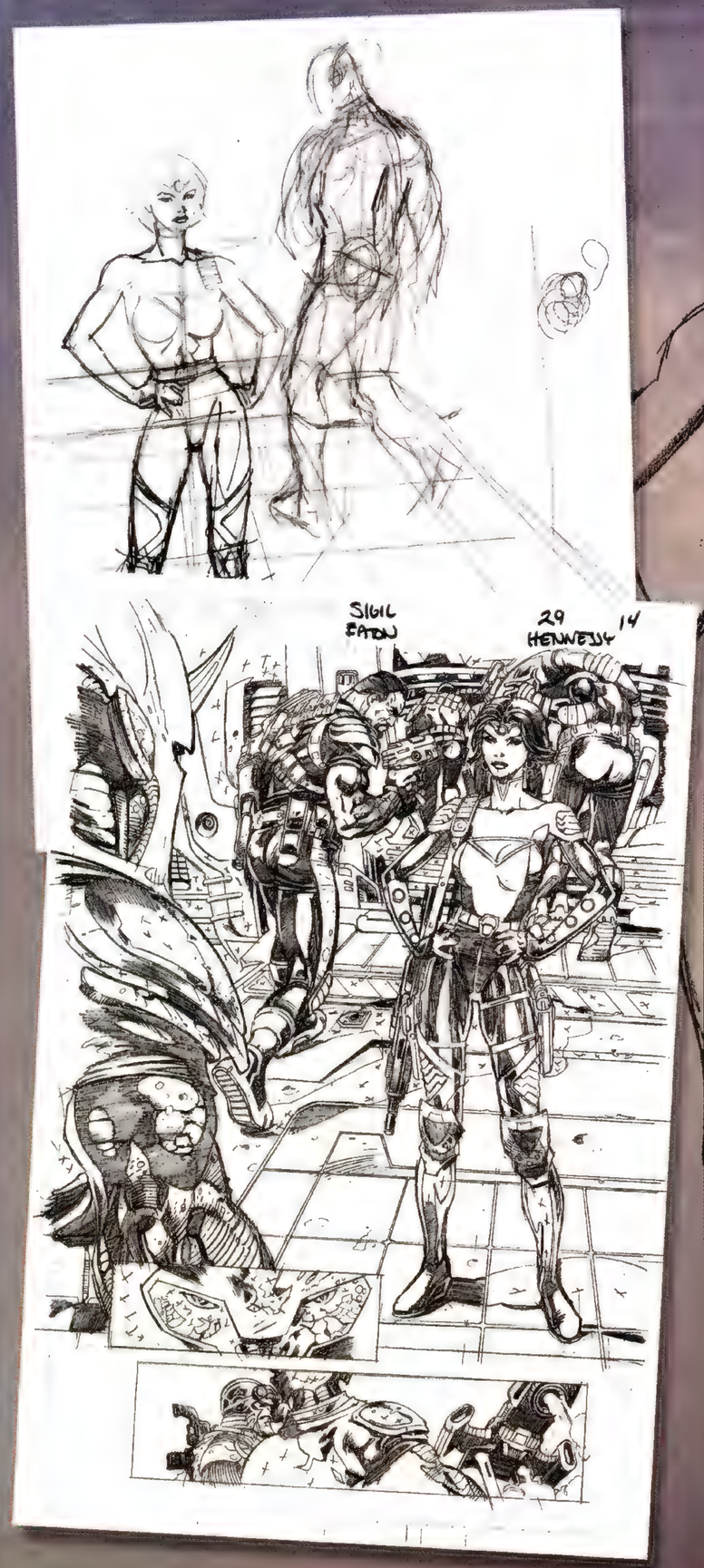


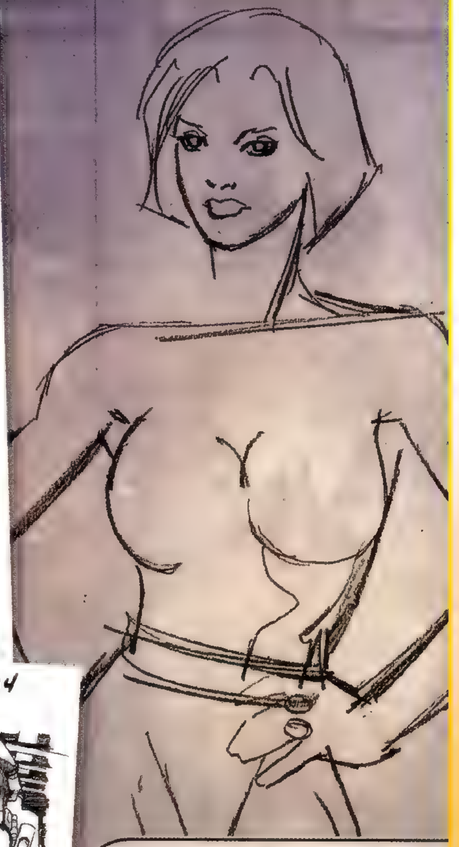
At the same time, I may make decisions at the final stage to move things around and work out nuances of gesture. I'm still working out certain elements of the page, like Zanni's face, her expression talking to Loser, or the whole bottom panel, which ends up including Zanni while the ship takes off in the background.

I'm also free to adjust the composition here and there to help balance the page. On this page, for instance, it worked better to have the closeup of Zanni on the right in panel 1, which balances out Loser's big body in panel 2. That second headshot I slipped in over the reversed Xerox to go over in Bristol board.

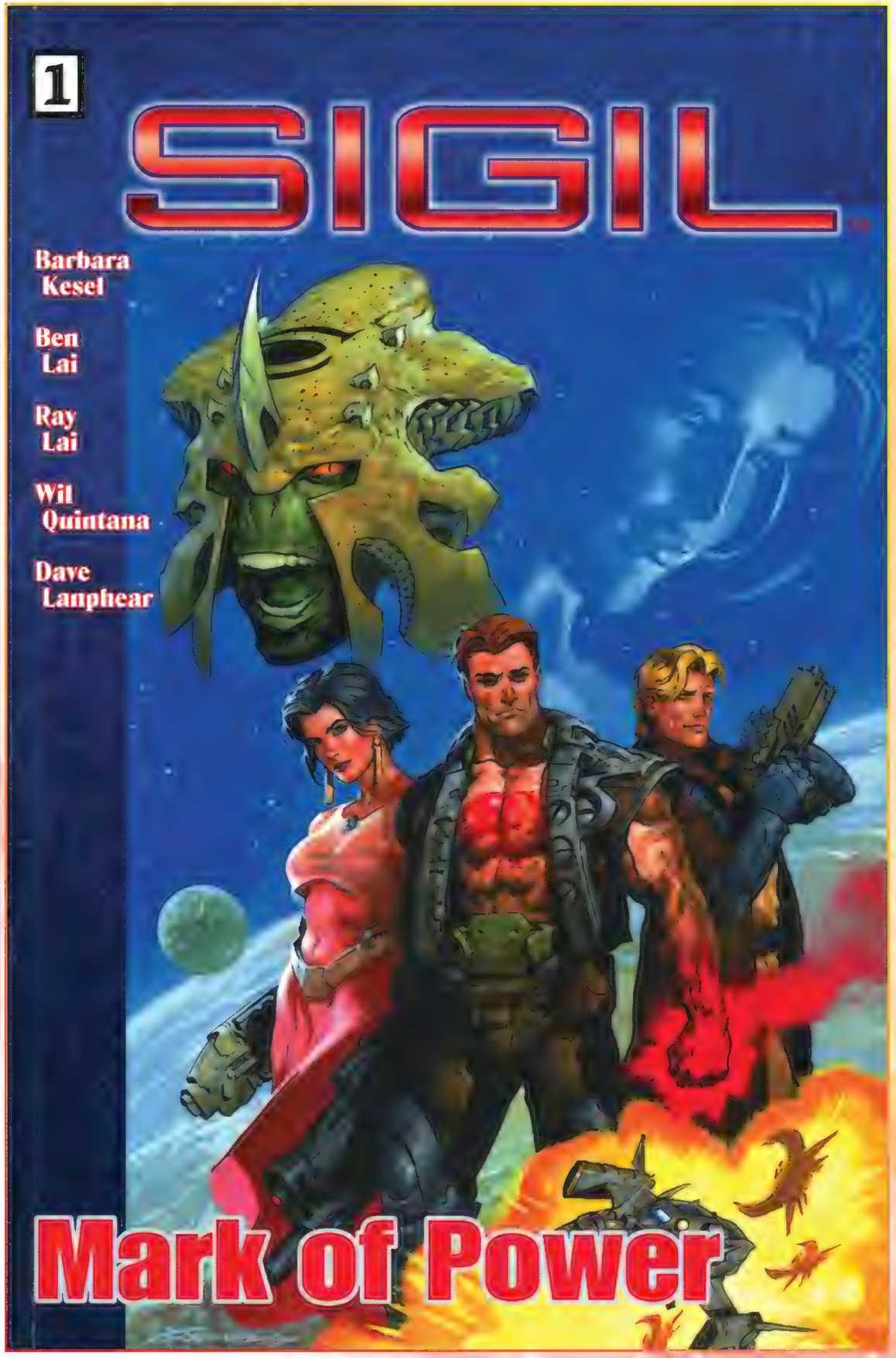


With the light shining through from below, I can see my layout and all the figures through the Bristol board. Then I essentially redraw everything on the page one last time, but with a difference. At this stage you can concentrate on the detail, because the layout is there, and you don't have to worry about composition. You don't have to worry about your figures being stiff, because you've built them up by from scratch with strong underdrawings and traditional draftsmanship. No matter how much detail you put in, they're going to be sound anatomically, and you don't have to worry about losing the life in a drawing.



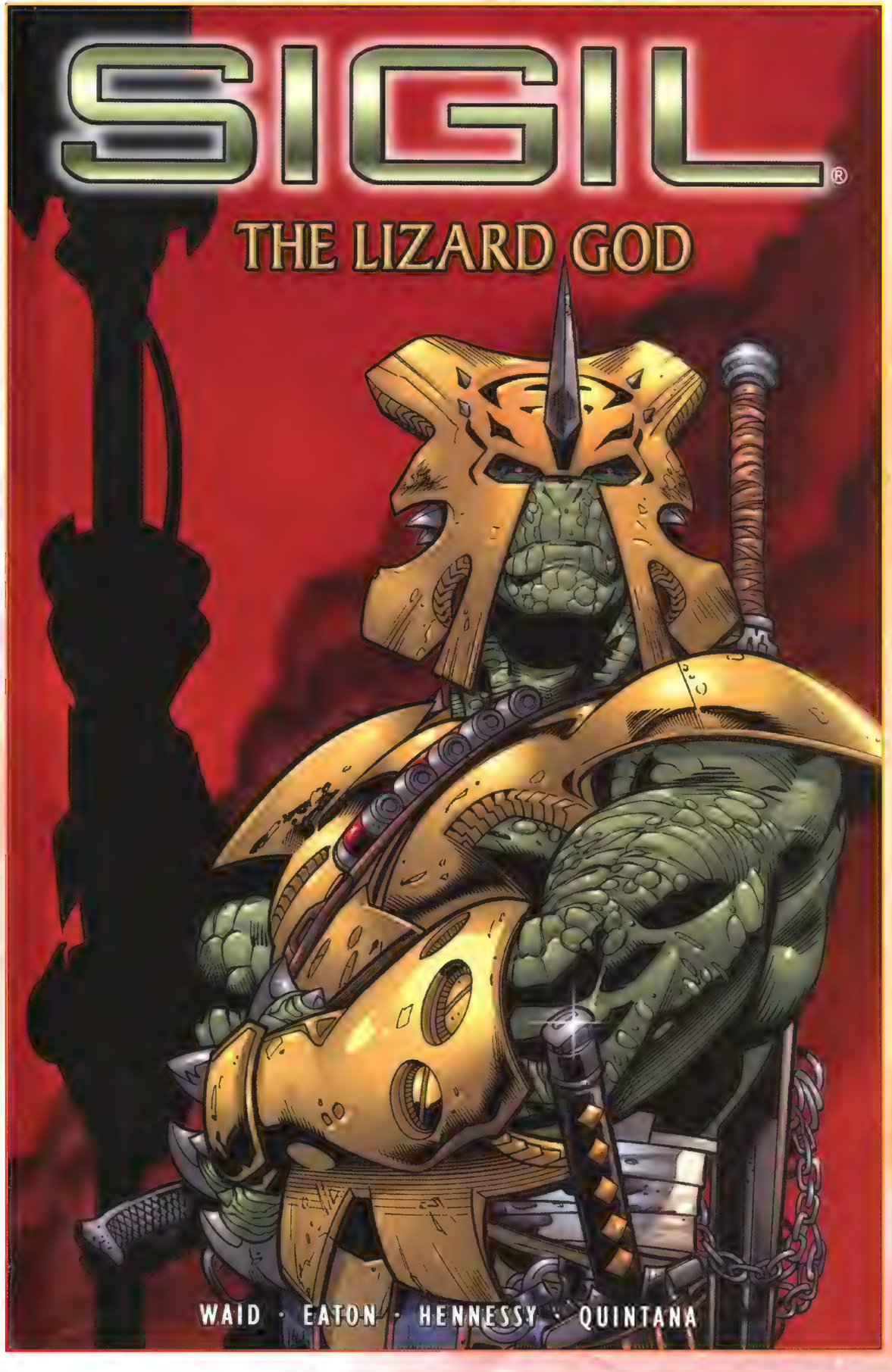


This may seem like a lot of steps, but by taking the traditional drawing steps and doing them small, I can still maintain a schedule, and I don't have to take a lot of shortcuts. A lot of people in their careers make the mistake of aping another artist's style or literally trying to draw like them. The best artists understand a lot of these rules about art or drawing, and they've practiced to the point where they can go through all these steps and still keep a monthly schedule. A lot of them probably use steps like I just described, but looking at the end result of my work or any artists work is not going to help you learn the steps that allow you to create it.



SIGIL VOL. 1: MARK OF POWER TPB COLLECTED *SIGIL #1-7* AND THE SIGIL STORY FROM *CROSSGEN CHRONICLES #1*. COVER BY **CHRISTOPHER MOELLER**

SIGIL VOL. 2: THE MARKED MAN TPB COLLECTED *SIGIL #8-14* AND *CROSSGEN CHRONICLES #4*. COVER BY **JOE CHIODO**



SIGIL VOL. 3: THE LIZARD GOD TPB COLLECTED *SIGIL #15-20*. COVER BY **SCOT EATON**

SIGIL VOL. 4: HOSTAGE PLANET TPB COLLECTED *SIGIL #21-26*. COVER BY **SCOT EATON**

"JOHN F. KENNEDY, WHEN ASKED HOW HE HAD BECOME A WAR HERO, REPLIED, 'IT WAS INVOLUNTARY. THEY SANK MY BOAT.'"
QUOTED BY ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER JR., AUTHOR OF *A THOUSAND DAYS*

WHAT MAKES A HERO?

Now, that's a very loaded question, with about as many answers as there are stars in the sky. So let's narrow it down. When I think of heroes, I think of people who, regardless of their abilities or preparedness, place someone else's needs before their own and then make a sacrifice in order to help someone. Granted, that's a very broad definition, but that's what I think.

So what makes a person sacrifice something for someone else? At what point in time does his psychological makeup — which is shaped by his upbringing, his life experience and his philosophies — match up with a mission or a cause and turn his motives from selfish to selfless?

This isn't a rhetorical question asked so I can spout out my philosophies on heroes and villains. I change my own answers pretty regularly. No, I asked because I was actually counting on Samandahl Rey to tell me.

We created Sam, and the whole cast of characters in *Sigil*, to explore that very basic theme of the reluctant hero. In fact, before we came up with the final title of *Sigil*, we used the working title "The Unwilling Hero" in all of our brainstorming meetings.

You see, Sam isn't a hero. Not yet, at least. And he isn't sure he knows how to be one. That's what we thought would be an interesting story to tell. In most hero-oriented comic books, the "origin" story is the big key. Take an inherently good character, slap him down with a tragedy or other life-changing event, provide him a power and/or a costume, and by the end of issue #1, you've got instant hero.

With Sam, we wanted to make his journey of *becoming* a hero the primary story, not the quest for some powers and a costume. In our stories, the granting of the Sigil, a talisman of unique and unmeasured power in the CrossGen Universe, is not the culmination of a character's "coming of age." It's rarely even a gift in the traditional sense, since at least at first it tends to actually cause more problems than it solves. While it brings certain physical gifts to its bearer, they're accompanied by unexpected and lugubrious burdens. Power can have a corrupting influence on the person who wields it, but it can also have a corrupting influence on the people around it. As you read this volume, you'll see the advantages, the frustrations and the consequences inherent in the manifestation of instant power, and the beginning of how Sam comes to deal with power first as a man, and second, as a hero-to-be.

Of course, you'll also get one heck of a science fiction story, to boot. Now, at this point, I want people to take notice that we haven't used the term "science fiction" until now. Yes, *Sigil* is a story set in a world populated by a wide variety of science fiction conventions — aliens, spaceships, rays guns and stuff like that — but it's not a "science fiction story." It's a hero's story set against a science fiction backdrop, but Sam's character is universal. He could be Rick in *Casablanca* (which *Sigil* writer Barbara Kesel will tell you later in this volume was a great inspiration for her in writing these first seven issues), he could be Nick Nolte in a "buddy cop" movie, or Clint Eastwood in any number of his early westerns. To propel Sam on his quest, we could have put him anywhere, in any time, to tell the story. So why science fiction?

Well, blame Patrick Stewart and Gene Roddenberry. Yes, I am a fan of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which is still, to date, the best-executed vision of what that franchise was meant to be. Patrick Stewart's performances as Captain Jean-Luc Picard represent, in many ways, the complete antithesis to the man that Sam Rey is at the beginning of *Sigil*. Where Picard is a thinking man's hero who analyzes each crisis and finds answers through the strength of his experience and wisdom, Sam's solution to most problems is to destroy things. And that's what will make Sam's voyage dynamic and interesting. Deep down, he wants to be that wiser, more thoughtful hero, but he is constantly struggling against his natural tendency to be more combative than constructive. Who knows which way he'll gravitate? Against the backdrop of the classic space opera, the possibilities are limitless. Space provides a grand scale and an unlimited template for action and adventure, giving *Sigil* a great launching pad for a story that has the potential to be dynamically unlike any other space opera ever told before — because, in this science fiction setting, there is one x-factor that doesn't exist anywhere else — the unpredictability of the CrossGen Universe. Sigils and godlike beings intermix with SF concepts and ideas to form a backdrop on a grand mythological scale. We're able to bring you a world where you really don't know what is going to, or for that matter, *could* happen next.

So, as you're reading this volume, remember I'll be reading right along with you, searching for the answers between the captions and the splash pages, looking for the hero that resides in each of us.

MARK ALESSI

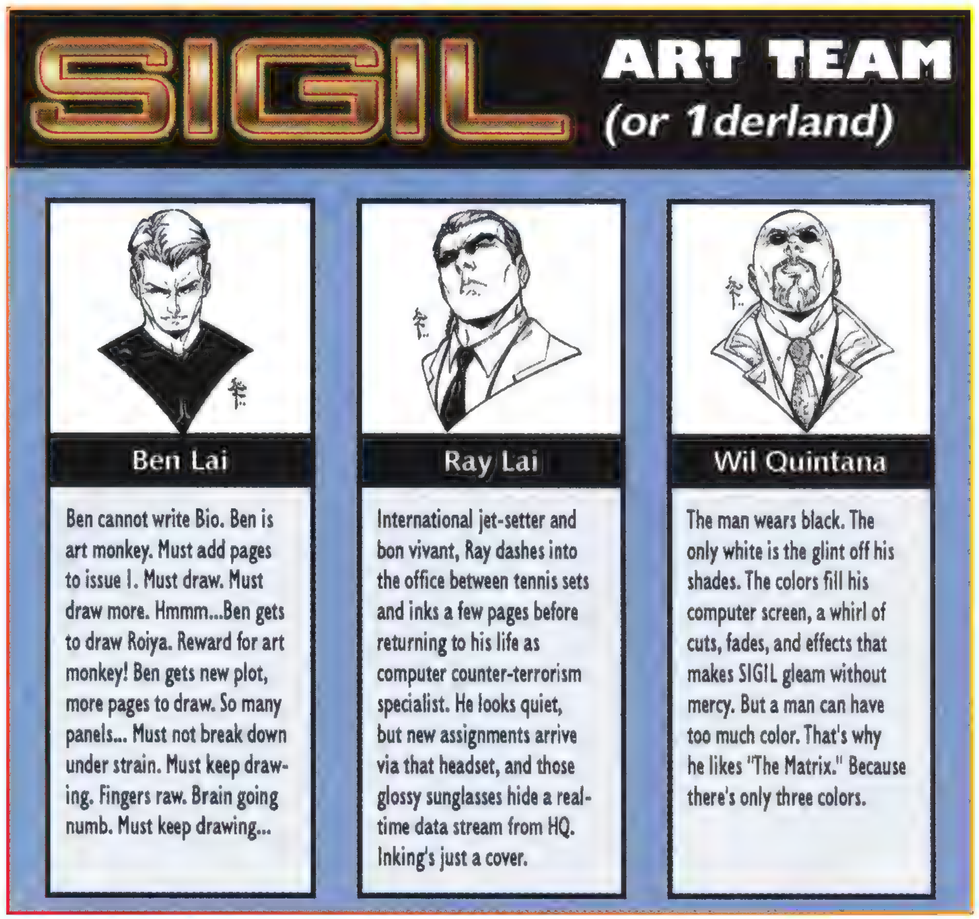
When CrossGen launched in May 2000, the goal was to debut with a splash. An initial release of four monthly titles seemed to be the right number, but asking fans to buy four comics to get a taste of a brand-new universe of stories was asking a lot.

Hence, *CrossGen Chronicles #1* offered an opportunity to sample the characters, worlds and stories surrounding *Mystic, Sigil, Scion* and *Meridian*. The issue featured five-page vignettes respectively showcasing each lead character and storyline. The trick was placing them all within the context of one story, so the choice was made to use the godlike beings of the CrossGen Universe, the First, as a framing device.

It was also decided that the five-page interludes would present the characters just after they'd been granted their sigils, allowing an exploration of how they reacted to those sigils. As far as the timeline was concerned, the sequences would fit between issues #1 and #2 of the individual series. Once the #1 issues hit the stands, perceptive readers would be able to fit together the chronology. Leaving a trail of clues for clever readers to follow would become a CrossGen hallmark.

In *Sigil*, this scene shows Sam in the emotional aftermath of awakening to discover that his best friend is dead. Still in shock from the physical effects of sigil activation and the discovery of two strangers on his ship, the final blow comes when he realizes the ship is speaking to him…in a familiar voice.

Here it is, presented "in sequence" for the first time.



SIGIL ART TEAM BIOGRAPHIES FROM *CROSSGEN CHRONICLES #1*

SIGIL #2 ARTICLE FROM *SIGIL VOL. 1: MARK OF POWER TPB*

WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE TANIPAL

At CrossGen, we feel that if you're going to borrow a little something, start with the classics.

When we first meet Sam and Roiya, they are having a grand old time on Tanipal, a setting inspired by the classic casino locale of the film *Casablanca*. Tanipal is a planet that exists for pleasure, an intergalactic Las Vegas wedged smack in the middle of an age-old war zone. But no fighting ever takes place there. It's the unspoken "neutral zone" whose sanctity is broken in our first chapter by a brutal surprise invasion of Saurian soldiers.

While Sam and Roiya aren't exactly Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, *Sigil* writer Barbara Kesel gave their relationship a similar star-crossed quality, mixing Bogie's scoundrel with Bacall's tough exterior.

"*Sigil* is the concept I carried with me driving cross-country when I first moved to Florida from Oregon to take the job as head writer for CrossGen, developing characters and story ideas along the way," Barbara said. "We knew this character, who picked up the name Samandahl Rey somewhere between Iowa and Kentucky, would play a key role in the mythology of the Sigil-Bearers. His code title was 'The Unwilling Hero,' so we always knew that this was not the guy who would be Mr. Stand-Up-And-Take-Charge-And-Be-A-Hero right off the bat. He would need some simmer time on that burner."

Barbara said she envisioned Sam as a man in his 40s, but "a Harrison Ford 40, 'well-preserved' and still action-hero active."

"I wanted Sam to start out on the wrong side of mid-life," she said. "When this power comes into his life, it represents the very last chance for him to have an impact on his world. He's always been a very good guy on the inside, but the world never rewarded him for that, so he kind of drifted into the ethical twilight zone. Getting the sigil gives him a second chance to be the hero. We wanted someone who was handsome but rugged — someone who had some life experience, with more than a few miles on the odometer. We needed a character who had his own preconceived notions, his own prejudices, because our plan was to take all those notions and prove them wrong during the course of the development of his character."

Roiya and Zanniati were characters created to be contrasts, according to Barbara.

"Basically, Roiya's the good girl in the 'tough girl' suit, and Zanni's the tough girl in the 'good girl' suit. Sort of. When we first meet Zanni, she's in the Sultan of Tanipal's harem as his thirteenth wife, but her outfit does not reflect her true colors."

Needless to say, all of these conventions get turned on their ear when our version of "Rick's Place" (the bar from *Casablanca*, for those of you not familiar with this extraordinary film) is attacked. Roiya, whom many who read comics might assume is a sidekick (because she's female and because she's not the lead character of the comic), is actually the most heroic figure through the first chapter of *Sigil*. While Sam is more of a mercenary scoundrel, Roiya is the one who symbolizes heroic sacrifice during Tanipal's invasion, effectively turning yet another science fiction standard on its ear. Her familiar banter with Sam made her seem to some like a love interest — but killing her in the first chapter put a bit of a spoiler on those hopes. So what started out as a nice homage to science fiction and classic film stereotypes ends with just about every preconceived notion turned upside down and inside out.

"Ask Mark Alessi," Barbara joked. "I'm allergic to doing anything exactly the same way it's been done before."

SIGIL #3 ARTICLE FROM *SIGIL VOL. 1: MARK OF POWER TPB*

THE UNITED COLORS OF COMICS

Sigil penciler Ben Lai and *Sigil* inker, brother Ray Lai, weren't quite sure what they were looking at.

Sigil writer Barbara Kesel brought to the office an old comic book from the 1970s to demonstrate some of the storytelling techniques of comics' "Silver Age" artists. But to the Lais, something didn't look right.

"It was the color," Barbara recalled. "Until that point, they had never seen a flat-colored comic before."

For the uninitiated, flat-color refers to a process by which basic colors, through the standard four-color process, were applied to comic books back in the early days. Before the advent of computers, comic books would be sent to the printing plant in black-and-white format along with a color guide to show the printer what was supposed to be blue, what was supposed to be red, and so forth. Most of the time, minimum-wage printing-plant pre-press artists would literally paint red glop onto plastic sheets which were then photographed through filters to generate the various "dot" levels for the four colors (YRBK, or yellow, red, blue and black) in order to make Superman's shift blue (B, or 100% blue) and his "S" shield red (YR, or 100% magenta and 100% yellow).

Today, with the advent of computers, it's possible for colorists to achieve a near-painted quality to their work. The Lai Brothers, having been fans primarily of Japanese *manga* (comic books) and comic books published by companies like Image, had never seen a standard four-color comic book in their lives.

"Ben and Ray were part of the first generation affected by the paradigm shift still taking place in comics today," proclaims Barbara. "It used to be that comic-book art was considered *finished* after it was penciled and inked, and then it was sent out to be colored, as if the coloring wasn't really part of the art, just a final process. Ben and Ray represent a new generation that believes the art is not finished *until* it is colored."

In a vacuum, that attitude alone would seem to pave the way for better comics. But it was the studio system CrossGen employs that added human interaction to the dazzling computer effects available to create the most synergistic situation possible.

"With the computer capabilities we have now, much of what appears on the final page goes beyond what was on the already terrific penciled and inked art," Barbara said. "Once again, having everybody in-house means that the three artists on each page can contribute fully to the communal process of creating that page. The penciler can set up an effect knowing what tools the colorist has to bring it to life, or even create additional levels to the page that exist as special effects to be imported by the colorist. The art on the page is no longer 'all there' before the coloring effects are completed."

Of course, that was an important point for *Sigil* colorist Wil Quintana. While he was already immersed in the process of computer coloring, Ben and Ray's attitude about colors affected Wil greatly because many of their pages left a great deal of room for a colorist's contributions. They counted on Wil to contribute to the look, mood and feel of every page.

"They certainly made me feel like a more active participant in the whole creative process of the book," Wil said. "In reinforced the fact that in today's comic books, you can't rely on just the penciler to do great dynamic stuff to grab and hold on to a reader's attention — it's equal shares with the inker and the colorist."

SIGIL #4 ARTICLE FROM *SIGIL VOL. 1: MARK OF POWER TPB*

TRIAD OF INTRIGUE

While many comic books tend to use other comic books as reference points and inspiration, CrossGen's approach was different. While our direction owes a lot to comic books from the past, it also owes a lot to more broad-ranging cultural and classical influences.

For *Sigil* writer Barbara Kesel, mythology and classic heroic literature serve as her muses.

"Classic structure seems to create a triangle of three: hero, warrior and jester," explained Barbara. "We used this structure in *Sigil*, setting up the triangle of Roiya, Sam and JeMerik, but not in the roles you might initially expect. *Roiya* was set up as the hero, not Sam. That's a classic fallacy with stories in this genre. People think that the lead character is automatically the hero when, in fact, other characters may possess more inherently heroic characteristics. Now, the hero — Roiya — gets killed in chapter one, so the guy who is used to being the backup, the fighter who just kicks butt when he's told to kick butt, must suddenly take on the role of hero. This doesn't mean he's suited to it — he's just placed in it, with the other two (one, granted, in 'spirit' form) to guide him along."

The wild card here is JeMerik Meer, who in this triad takes the role of jester. Below is the actual character description written by Barbara way back in 1999, many months before issue #1 of *Sigil* hit the stands.

"JEMERIK MEER: A tall, stylish fashion plate with short gold-white curls and a glowing smile hiding his scheming mind, JeMerik is clearly the most good-looking man of the bunch. He loves to flirt, to charm, to laugh, to enjoy life. He is both enjoyable and a nuisance. Since his main form of supporting himself is to sponge off others, he travels very light. He carries a small shoulder pack with his vital belongings, a bag that always seems to have just what he needs to salvage any situation. His strange orange eyes mark him as unusual."

Barbara liked JeMerik because he became a classic foil for Sam's tough-guy persona.

"JeMerik is just the kind of guy who would make Sam crazy," Barbara said. "He's young, good-looking, he has the easy job, and things always seem to fall into place for him. He is everything that Sam might really have wanted to be but never had the chance."

So with the role switcheroo, Sam finds himself with the power to perhaps tap the hidden potential within himself — if he can only overcome all the cynicism and bitterness that having a guy like JeMerik around brings out in him.

"Sam's the first hero to come along in his universe in a while," Barbara said. "There's a war that's been going on for so long, and the humans there are so beaten down, that they can barely bring the idea of a hero to mind. In one sense JeMerik seems to be goading Sam, but in the long run, it's just the thing that Sam needs to realize that it takes more than strength and power to be a hero; it takes strength of one's convictions and an enormous amount of willpower."

SIGIL #5 ARTICLE FROM *SIGIL VOL. 1: MARK OF POWER TPB*

AND ON THE SEVENTH DAY...

According to the book of *Genesis*, it took God seven days to create the universe.

For the CrossGen Brain Trust of Mark Alessi, Gina Villa, Barbara Kesel, Ron Marz and Brandon Peterson, it took the better part of two days to create the worlds of *Sigil*. Maybe it was the whole "multiple planet" thing that cost them the extra time.

"Well, I started thinking about things in the car when I was driving cross-country to move to Florida," Barbara said. "Then there were five days of conferences in-house, where the gist of every book got created, and then I would write up specific character, world and setting descriptions and give them to the artists. During that process on *Sigil*, the Lai brothers sometimes discovered something new that they liked and threw it back my way until the Powers That Be were satisfied with the Lais' design work. Seven days to create a universe? Creating the specific worlds and locales for *CrossGenesis*, our first preview comic, took a couple of weeks. So, creating the whole universe took about two months."

One of the more collaborative efforts was the design of the costumes for the main characters. CrossGen art director Brandon Peterson supervised the Lai brothers as they worked on the look and feel of *Sigil*'s cast of characters.

"When the costumes were initially being designed, the Lai brothers brought in a heavy *manga* influence, as this is what they were familiar with," Brandon said. "*Manga*-style science fiction is very popular in Japan, and it's distinguished by a certain ruggedness, a sense of bulk and equipment. I think Sam's costume reflects those sensibilities. Sam almost looks military with his Spartan lack of decoration, but his initial costume also has elements of a very futuristic armor."

One of the pillars of the CrossGen Universe is that our characters will not be as tied to "costumes" in the classic sense of super-hero comic book characters. CrossGen's characters change their clothes just like normal people, and it was more important initially for the art teams to develop a style and a look than it was a specific costume for a specific character.

"Roiya's initial costume matched a lot of Sam's lines in design," Brandon explained. "She was in the same type of work as a soldier of fortune, so that made sense. Later, that changed somewhat. JeMerik's look was radically different from theirs in its use of cloth instead of metal. Zanni, on the other hand, initially wore a costume that suited her appearance but not necessarily her character. Zanni was created as an exotic beauty, and she had to wear this harem outfit because she was one of the Sultan's wives. However, it won't be her style as the story progresses. Now, unlike standard super-hero books, these characters' clothing was functional, and so defining a look for them that could be consistent through clothing changes and several different settings through the first story arc was difficult, especially when the incidental characters were dressed in similar fashions. In reading through the book, I think we were successful in that the characters remained easily identifiable."

SIGIL #6 ARTICLE FROM *SIGIL VOL. 1: MARK OF POWER TPB*

THE REVENGE OF STEVE

The award-winning author and playwright George Bernard Shaw once said, "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches."

Well, Steve McNiven isn't that cynical. For Steve, a staff penciler at CrossGen and fill-in penciler for the chapter you've just read, it was quite the reverse from Shaw's rule. Steve was an art teacher who turned in his chalkboard for a drawing table at CrossGen and never looked back.

For Steve, it all started in July of 1999. He attended a comic book convention in San Diego and dropped off some samples at the CrossGen booth even though CrossGen hadn't begun publishing yet — it was the company's first appearance at Comic-Con International.

"I got a call from [CrossGen C.E.O.] Mark Alessi just as school was starting, and we talked," Steve recalled. "He sent me down a test plot, which I turned around and sent back in mid-October 1999. Not long after that, I got the offer to be an associate penciler, which meant doing fill-in work and training to maybe someday take over the monthly penciling chores on a CrossGen comic book. By January of 2000, I'd moved my family from Canada to Tampa, Florida."

Now the full-time penciler on *Meridian*, another CrossGen Comics monthly title, Steve took a major step in his new career with the previous chapter of this book.

"That issue of *Sigil* was my first full complete comic-book story, complete with cover and all, so I was trying to iron things out, trying to perfect everything from storytelling to rendering — definitely a trial by fire," Steve said.

Still true to his teacher roots, Steve was also his own harshest critic.

"I think parts of it turned out well, but there is some stuff that makes me cringe a little," Steve chuckled. "Now, a lot of people say that's supposed to be good, looking back on something you've done and deciding it's not as good as you wanted. It means you're progressing, but man! It's still a bit painful!"

Still, Steve's cover to *Sigil #6* has become one of the hallmark images of the first story arc. But interpreting Sam and his battle with the Saurians in the initial sequence of that issue, a scene Steve found particularly enjoyable, was a bit daunting.

"It was fun working with those characters," he said. "I loved the action and the energy in the book. One of the harder things to tackle, though, was the outfitting and weaponry of the characters. One of the strengths of Ben Lai, *Sigil*'s original penciler, was that he knew how to design 'tech-ware.' He simply had a knack for doing those sorts of things, and it was very hard to follow up on that. He had a way of making things work that was hard to duplicate, but in the end, I really think that we stayed true to the material and to the story."

Sigil writer Barbara Kesel, a former editor at publishers DC and Dark Horse, also took some pride in Steve's initial work because it afforded her the opportunity to predict where Steve's talents would be best utilized.

"This issue was his first full story, and through all the science fiction trappings, equipment and techno-stuff, I saw little nuances in Steve's style that made me think he would be a perfect fit for *Meridian*," Barbara said. "Time — and the fans — have proven me right on this one."

SIGIL #7 ARTICLE FROM *SIGIL VOL. 1: MARK OF POWER TPB*

SPACESHIPS AND RAY GUNS AND ALIENS, OH MY!

For writer Barbara Kesel, her first night brainstorming for her new CrossGen assignment, *Sigil*, was a Blockbuster night.

"When I knew I was working on *Sigil*, I went and re-watched every science fiction film ever done to get a sense for how science fiction up to this point had been visually represented," Barbara said. "I desperately wanted to make *Sigil* as distinctively different from the other science fiction comic books done before as possible. We knew we wanted a classic space opera adventure series, which meant that certain givens were involved — spaceships, ray blasters, aliens — but we also wanted to have our own identity, which led us to revisit those conventions with our own twists.

"So our spaceships (well, the human ones) carry 'keyhole probes' to zoom through space and their pilots lust after the newer (and easier!) technology the Saurians have developed. Our evil Saurian villains turn out to have their own noble culture and may even be smarter than the humans, and the series is generously layered with the politics of human ambition so even the good guys do bad things…for the right reasons."

Even the alien race at war with the humans had to have a twist, one hinted at in early issues but not fully revealed until later: a taste for human flesh which is literally changing their form.

"We decided that the Saurians would have the advantage over the humans ('cause everybody likes the underdog!), so the Saurian race has plasma technology and plasma-slinging bladecasters, while the humans had to come from behind with weapons that were one level more primitive. And it turns out that the Saurians have a genetic twist that lets them be everything the humans are… except more feral."

From Barbara's own notes made in 1999 during the development of *Sigil*, here is the very first written description of the Saurians:

"THE SAURIANS: Start with a vaguely raptor-like form but change the eyes to be more alien, an optical field with a pair of pupils. Their heads are triangular, like 3/4 of a Phillips-head screwdriver as the armature under a dinosaur's skin. (No room for a braincase as we know it; they have three stacked brains running down their heads and thick muscular necks.) Three colorful gill slashes line the neck; these puff with bright color when the 'saur' is angry. The bottom of the three is the poison sac. They rub darts on the secretions from this gillsac. The toxin is fatal to most other species. They have two symmetrical tactical limbs capable of holding tools and small weapons, and two working limbs that supply propulsion and strength. (Imagine a dino holding a sword in one foot while 'standing' on the other and his tail.) They are superb fighters; that extra lower limb gives them an incredible up-close advantage. They do not wear clothing as humans do, but they do decorate themselves with bands on their tactical limbs and power limbs. These bands are made of the skins of other species and decorated with metal and jewels. They wear electronic voiceboxes to emulate human speech. Their own is a series of grunts, clicks and whistles."

The initial Saurian designs called for a drastically different race. During development, it was determined that a more "human"-looking Saurian race fit better into the evolving mythos of the human-Saurian war because, "we needed our villains to be able to *emote*."

The whole *Sigil* universe is blindsided by the appearance of Sam and his sigil-based power. And that's where the classic concepts of science fiction get to struggle with the basic rules of the CrossGen Universe. The power of the sigil strongly impacts the human race, the Saurian race and the war between them.

"We wanted to keep *Sigil* a science fiction series where you only *kind of* knew what to expect, because it's subject to intrusion by other forces in the CrossGen Universe," Barbara said. "This is a story that co-exists with the world of *The First* and other Sigil-Bearers and sidekicks and more powerful beings who, seen from Sam's point of view, are all just impediments to exterminating the Saurians. Sam is the lightning rod for all of these different forces coming into play, intermixing their world of demigods and intrigue with Sam's science-fictiony world."

Sounds like a party.

SIGIL VOL. 5: DEATH MATCH TPB (CHECKER BOOKS) COLLECTED *SIGIL #27-32*.
INTRODUCTION BY **CAMMIE LEDBETTER**

Everyone loves a good old-soldier story: a heart-of-gold hero, suddenly bestowed with supernatural powers to save the universe from a terrible fate. Everyone would like to have a man like Samandahl Rey on their side. Every government would like a weapon like him in their arsenal.

Sigil was introduced in July of 2000 as one of the first storylines in the CrossGen Universe, linked to several other series that were set in the same universe, in different places and times. CrossGen released issues #1-26 in a total of four collections: *Mark of Power, The Marked Man, The Lizard God* and *Hostile Planet*. Unfortunately, only a month after *Sigil* issue #42 was released, the company's operations ceased, cutting off *Sigil*'s story and leaving Volume 5, *Death Match*, uncollected.

Sigil's writer, Chuck Dixon (*Way of the Rat, Batman, The Hobbit*) is famous for characters doing instead of talking, and penciler Scot Eaton's (*Captain America, Thor*) fast-moving characters seem never to stop for breath. *Sigil* is the graphic-novel equivalent to a widescreen movie, with extra large, detailed panels. Colorist Andrew Crossley's (*Scion, Sojourn, Fantastic Four*) purposeful, vibrant color distinguishes settings and guarantees that there is always something interesting to look at.

Sam, the sigil-bearing protagonist charged to "Find them, gather them and lead them," is still learning to use his mysterious powers, struggling to find a way to save the universe and fighting the guilt he feels for not being able to do more. Man against himself, the inner struggle that drives him, could yet mean his destruction. Can he continue to channel his power or will he sacrifice himself to his mission? Don't we all walk this tightrope sometimes?

Another theme that emerges in *Sigil* is human versus nonhuman. One example is the ongoing war between humans and lizards. This war is much like real-world conflicts of today, both sides believing they are justified in their actions and both sides positive they have the blessing of a supernatural being. Both are convinced that they are in the midst of a life and death struggle to preserve their own race and culture, and the overtones of power and politics rule each side. Sound familiar? Another example of this theme is evident in the hologram Roiya's relationship with the newly resurrected flesh-and-blood Roiya. Is one more real than the other? Does one have more right to exist than the other? Would erasing the hologram be murder? This has been the debate of artificial intelligence since before Asimov. Even now these questions are no closer to being answered — but does that mean we should stop asking them?

CAMMIE LEDBETTER
ARTIST AND ASSOCIATE EDITOR,
CHECKER BOOK PUBLISHING GROUP

SIGIL VOL. 6: PLANETARY UNION TPB (CHECKER BOOKS) COLLECTED *SIGIL #33-38*.
INTRODUCTION BY **CAMMIE LEDBETTER**

In space, it is always night — the darkness of infinity sprinkled with pin points of white fire. The light of a universe must be judged by the deeds and hearts of its inhabitants. Like the two halves of the Sigil, some universes are bright and some are devoid of light and joy. Negation is such a place. The two CrossGen worlds collide as the Negation finds its way into the bright universe through the anger that led Sam to use his power to kill.

Sigil's writer, Chuck Dixon (*Way of the Rat, Batman, The Hobbit*) finally winds the tales together, and penciler Scot Eaton's (*Captain America, Thor*) panels convey the intensity and emotion of every scene. Colorist Andrew Crossley's (*Scion, Sojourn, Fantastic Four*) juxtaposition of light and dark, warm and cool tones emphasize the chasm separating the bright and the drear.

In Goethe's "Faust," Mephistopheles says that there can be no light without darkness, no hope without despair, no courage without fear and no adoration without scorn. Does this mean that there can be no victor? Does the destruction of one inherently mean the downfall of the other?

No white without black, but in the place where the two meet — in the abyss of grayness — is where the greatest parables and legends come to life.

Farewell from a bright universe,

CAMMIE LEDBETTER
EDITOR, CHECKER BOOKS

SIGIL #43 SCRIPT BY **CHUCK DIXON**, PUBLISHED ONLINE BY CROSSGEN AFTER THE SERIES' SUDDEN CANCELLATION WITH #42. (*SIGIL #43* WAS MEANT TO LEAD INTO THE *NEGATION WAR* MINISERIES, BUT THAT TOO WAS CANCELLED MID-STORYLINE WITH ISSUE #2.)

SIGIL #43 was originally announced as the series finale for the galaxy-spanning, space chase title. This week, readers learned the final issue had instead been moved up to issue #42. All of us at CrossGen are very sorry that we had to stop the party early, as we know how much our loyal fans had been looking forward to plot resolutions for the space soldier Sam as the invading Negation forces trigger the upcoming War. Especially since Chuck Dixon wrote such a great issue!

But, then we thought, "Hey…since Chuck wrote it, can't we share it with the fans?"

Of course we can!

SIGIL #43
Plot/Script by Chuck Dixon

PAGE ONE
SPLASH
What the Hell---let's go SUPERMAN!

Sam is soaring down through space. He's got his fists before him and body arched with legs together in a perfect, athletic dive position. He's dramatically lit from a source off panel. Brilliant light rays follow him down.

CAPTION: STRPSTN--GALCARTLCTR-H-970944-PC-91201.6-PPCNT.
CAPTION: (TECH) "OBJECT APPROACHING 0.6 LIGHT."
CAPTION: (TECH) "SOURCE MATERIAL: ORGANIC."
CAPTION: (TECH) "POINT OF IMPACT: CONTINENT PRIME EQUATORIAL CENTER."

PAGES TWO AND THREE
INSERT PANEL ONE
He's streaking down into the atmosphere of a planet making a flaming contrail behind him like a comet.

CAPTION: (TECH) "OBJECT INITIALLY DETERMINED TO BE HUMAN."
CAPTION: (TECH) "SYSTEM CHECK REQUIRED."

BIG SPREAD
A planet in ruins. What's left of a city burns on a desert plain. Negation armored vehicles roll toward a huge transport vehicle. On an outcropping of rock in the foreground a bunch of Negation soldiers (make them any species of alien you care for, rats, bugs, crustaceans, marsupials) pause from their patrol to watch the contrail caused by Sam streak down through the sky in the distance.

CAPTION: (TECH) "PROFILE DETERMINATION SCIENTIFICALLY IMPROBABLE."
CAPTION: (TECH) "SPECIES HUMAN COULD NOT SUSTAIN PHYSICAL FORM---"
CAPTION: (TECH) "---AT VELOCITY OR HEAT LEVELS RECORDED."

INSERT PANEL TWO
Tight shot of Sam, his expression one of steely determination. He's enveloped in a flaming nimbus of a friction-induced inferno.
CAPTION: (TECH) "SUMMATION: THREAT LEVEL X."
CAPTION: (TECH) "X BEING UNKNOWN."

PAGES FOUR AND FIVE
BIG SPREAD
Where Sam strikes the planet is an enormous nuclear explosion. What doesn't turn to white hot sand is brushed away in chunks.

CAPTION: (ADMIRAL) "I DETERMINE THE THREAT ESTIMATE TO BE NEGLIGIBLE."
CAPTION: (ADMIRAL) "NO LIVING BEING KNOWN COULD SURVIVE A FALL FROM SPACE."
CAPTION: (ADMIRAL) "DISREGARD ALERTS."

INSERT PANEL ONE
Negation soldiers are vaporized where they stand.

INSERT PANEL TWO
A Negation tank tumbles end over end through the tsunami blast.

INSERT PANEL THREE
Negation dudes at control consoles of a ship react negatively to screens off panel.

TECH 1: um---ADMIRAL?

PAGES SIX AND SEVEN
INSERT PANEL ONE
Techs turn to a Negation admiral standing on the bridge and point to 3-D displays of the planet below and the spreading hot zone expanding from the epicenter of Sam's impact.

ADMIRAL: WHAT NOW?
TECH 1: IMPACT TO PRIME CONTINENT OF CONQUERED PLANET, ADMIRAL.
ADMIRAL: HOW EXTENSIVE AN IMPACT?

BIG SPREAD
A Negation fleet is parked in orbit about the planet. Bulky troop ships and such. The planet's surface is mostly covered by a circular area that glows brilliantly as it grows.

CAPTION: (TECH) "COMPLETE GLOBAL DEVASTATION, ADMIRAL."

CAPTION: (TECH) "PLANET SURFACE REACHING FIVE THOUSAND KRELLS."
CAPTION: (TECH) "THAT'S TWICE THE HEAT OF A STAR BEFORE NOVA, ADMIRAL."

INSERT PANEL TWO
The Negation admiral looks dismayed as a brilliant glow washes over him.

ADMIRAL: (SMALL) CHARON PRESERVE US---

INSERT PANEL THREE
Repeat panel. The glow all but washes him out.

INSERT PANEL FOUR
All white panel.

PAGE EIGHT
PANEL ONE
We see Holo-Roiya through a holographic star chart. She looks quizzically at a bright spot of light on the star field before her.

ROIYA: huh.
ROIYA: UNLESS MY SYSTEMS ARE WHACKED---A NEW STAR JUST APPEARED ON MY CHARTS---
ROIYA: ---IN THE HARADI SYSTEM.

PANEL TWO
We're on the bridge of the Bitterluck. Roiya turns to JeMerik and Zanni. JeMerik stands cool. Zanni rises from her seat.

ROIYA: WHAT COULD CAUSE THAT, JeMERIK?
JeMERIK: A NUMBER OF THINGS, ROIYA.
ZANNI: IT'S SAM.
ROIYA: REALLY, ZANNI---

PANEL THREE
Zanni reaches out to brush her fingers through the 3D image of the new star. She smiles slightly.

ZANNI: IT'S HIM.
ZANNI: I KNOW IT. I FEEL IT.
ZANNI: SET COURSE FOR HARADI---

PANEL FOUR
The Bitterluck soars through space.

FROM BITTERLUCK: (ZANNI) ---WE'RE GIVING HIM A RIDE.
CAPTION: (VEGA) "THIS WAS A BAD, BAD, BAD IDEA, LIZARD."

PAGE NINE
SPLASH
Cut to Loser and Vega in the beep of that hovercraft. Loser looks determined and steely. Vega is rising from his seat snarling. We're looking through the canopy at them and it's pockmarked with ray blasts and some bounce from it.

CAPTION: STRPSTN--GALCARTLC TR-?-00000-??-000000.0-??????
LOSER: YOU TOLD ME YOU WERE TOUGH, VEGA.
VEGA: TOUGH, NOT SUICIDAL.
LOSER: WHERE DO YOU THINK WE ARE, HUMAN?
VEGA: ON THE OTHER SIDE OF A RIP IN SPACE.
ANOTHER UNIVERSE. ANOTHER DIMENSION.
VEGA: HOW THE BLIP AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW, SCALEBACK?
LOSER: I BELIEVE I KNOW OUR LOCATION.

PAGES TEN AND ELEVEN
BIG SPREAD
The hovercraft roars through the hive-type setting you established last issue. Negationoids run for cover as the hovercraft sideswipes a walkway spilling a bunch to the ground. Other Negationoids fire small arms at the hovercraft and an armored vehicle of some sort blasts away causing more damage to the surrounding hive walls.

FROM HOVERCRAFT: (LOSER) THIS IS THE NEGATION UNIVERSE---
FROM HOVERCRAFT: (LOSER) ---THE SOURCE OF THE CREATURES AND WEAPONS THAT MAKE WAR ON BOTH OUR SPECIES.
FROM HOVERCRAFT: (VEGA) THAT'S GREAT TO HEAR. ANY IDEAS FOR GETTING OUT OF THS BUGTOWN?
FROM HOVERCRAFT: (LOSER) ONLY A THEORY---

PAGE TWELVE
PANEL ONE
Vega is clambering up (or down) into a gun pod.

VEGA: WELL, WHILE YOU WORK YOUR THEORY I'LL WORK THE GUNS.
VEGA: NEGATORY UNIVERSE OR NOT---WHATEVER LIVES CAN DIE.

PANEL TWO
Loser snarls as he jerks the controls back. Bright ray impacts through light across him.

LOSER: IF THERE'S ONE PORTAL TO OUR REALITY---
LOSER: ---THERE MUST BE ANOTHER.

PANEL THREE
Vega clambers up into the gun pod and we see the complex triggers and arrays. Keep the controls alien as this is a vehicle built by, and for, whatever Negationoids you've been using here.

VEGA: AND I DON'T CARE WHERE WE POP OUT, TCHLUSARUD.
VEGA: ANY PLACE IS BETTER THAN THIS!

PANEL FOUR
Vega looks out of the clear canopy of the gun pod with a wide-eyed expression of fear. A reflection of honey-combed hive walls is on the canopy surface.

VEGA: (SMALL) ANY PLACE---

PAGE THIRTEEN
SPLASH
The hovercraft busts out of the wall of a huge, egg shaped hive clinging to the face of a cliff on a desolate alien world. It's small to show scale. Other hives dot the landscape and elevated roadways connect them over forests of giant fungi. It's night and the sky is filled with too many stars. Or whatever. I'm blue-skying here. Go nuts. Make it alien, strange and cool.
FROM GUNPOD OF HOVERCRAFT: (VEGA, SMALL) ANY PLACE AT ALL---
CAPTION: (ZANNI) "IT'S BEAUTIFUL."

PAGE FOURTEEN
PANEL ONE
Large panel.
The Bitterluck drifts through a debris field before a brilliant new sun.

CAPTION: STRPSTN--GALCARTLCTR-H-970944-PC-91202.3-PPCNT.
FROM BITTERLUCK: (ZANNI) A NEW STAR CREATED BY SAM.
FROM BITTERLUCK: (ROIYA) YOU MAY JUST BE RIGHT ABOUT THAT, ZANNI.

PANEL TWO
Holo-Roiya observes some kind of chart or graph or whatever so long as it looks complex and sci-fi. Zanni peers at a holo image of the surrounding space with Jons Mith behind her.

ROIYA: THAT'S THE PLANET HARADI.
ROIYA: AND THERE'S NO INDICATION IT WAS EVER GOING TO TURN INTO A NUCLEAR FURNACE LIKE THIS.
ZANNI: IT'S SAM'S STAR.
JONS: IS THAT WHAT WE'LL CALL IT FROM NOW ON?

PANEL THREE
Zanni turns with an enormous smile on her face. Jons turns as well with an arched eyebrow.

OFF PANEL: (SAM) ACTUALLY, JONS---
OFF PANEL: (SAM, LINKED) ---I WANTED TO NAME IT FOR ZANNI.
ZANNI: OH!

PAGE FIFTEEN
PANEL ONE
Large panel.
Sam is smiling and stepping onto the bridge. Zanni runs for him.

SAM: SURPRISED?
ZANNI: SAM!

PANEL TWO
Zanni embraces him. He's smiling.

ZANNI: IT'S BEEN SO LONG!
SAM: HUH? IT'S ONLY BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE WE SAW EACH OTHER ON DELASSIA.
SAM: YOU COULDN'T HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT.

PANEL THREE
Repeat panel. Zanni pulls back from Sam with a puzzled look on her face. Sam's eyes narrow dangerously.

ZANNI: DELASSIA?
ZANNI: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I HAVEN'T BEEN BACK TO DELASSIA IN ALMOST TWO YEARS.
SAM: BUT YOU WERE THERE. WE WERE THERE. HOW COULD---

PAGES SIXTEEN AND SEVENTEEN
INSERT PANEL ONE
JeMerik is smiling as he looks up from where he's lounging in some kind of reclining crash couch. He has a drink in his hand with a straw. This is his private quarters however you want to distinguish it.

OFF PANEL: (SAM) JeMERIK!
JeMERIK: WHY, SAMANDAHL REY. HOW GOOD IT IS TO---

BIG SPREAD
Sam has rushed forward and lifted JeMerik from his chair with a grip on his tunic front. The drink goes flying. The crash couch is uprooted from the floor with sheered bolts flying. Zanni is the background, braced in a hatchway and looking horrified. Sam is PISSED! We've never seen him this angry.

SAM: IT WAS YOU!
SAM: IT WAS YOU ON DELASSIA WITH THAT WOMAN FROM---FROM---
JeMERIK: FROM EARTH---unnh---SAM.
SAM: I DON'T CARE WHERE SHE'S FROM!
ZANNI: WHAT'S THIS ABOUT? WHO'S THIS WOMAN?

INSERT PANEL TWO
Sam turns to look at us over his shoulder. He has JeMerik pinned to the bulkhead with a splayed hand on JeMerik's chest. Sam is snarling.

SAM: OUR MYSTERIOUS FRIEND TRICKED ME!
SAM: HE HAD SOME CRAZY IDEA ABOUT ME AND SOME ALIEN FEMALE SAVING THE UNIVERSE.
JeMERIK: HER NAME IS CAPRICIA AND I WAS TELLING THE TRUTH.

PAGE EIGHTEEN
PANEL ONE
JeMerik frowns at Sam who smiles humorlessly at him. JeMerik is still pinned.

SAM: I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DID IT---
JeMERIK: YOU'RE BEING DIFFICULT, SAM.
SAM: I HAVEN'T EVEN STARTED, YOU MEDDLING JERK!

PANEL TWO
Sam's power makes stringy tendrils of the ship's hull emerge around JeMerik to bind him.

JeMERIK: THIS IS ALL REALLY QUITE POINTLESS, FRIEND.
SAM: I'M NO FRIEND OF YOURS. I TOLD YOU AND YOUR GIRL PAL I WASN'T INTERESTED.

PANEL THREE
Sam turns from the entirely bound JeMerik to speak to Zanni who looks at Sam uncomprehending.

ZANNI: WHAT IS THIS ABOUT? WHAT DID JeMERIK DO? WHAT DID YOU DO, SAM?
SAM: I WAS TRICKED. I DIDN'T KNOW. JeMERIK USED HIS POWERS TO MAKE ME THINK THIS OTHER WOMAN WAS YOU.

ZANNI: AND WHAT HAPPENED, SAM?
PANEL FOUR
Sam shields Zanni from brilliant light that emerges from gaps in the binding about JeMerik.

JeMERIK: (FROM GLOW) ONLY THE FIRST STEP TOWARD ULTIMATE VICTORY OVER A POWERFUL FOE.
JeMERIK: (FROM GLOW) TO PRODUCE THE ONE WHO WILL TRIUMPH A UNION HAD TO BE MADE.
ZANNI: UNION?

PAGE NINETEEN
PANEL ONE
Large panel.
JeMerik stands encased in metal armor he's fashioned from the metal that Sam encased him in. He looks very angry.

JeMERIK: TO WIN THE DAY SACRIFICES MUST BE MADE.
JeMERIK: FRANKLY, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THIS ANGER TOWARD ME, SAM.
JeMERIK: FOR REASONS I CANNOT FATHOM, I FEEL AS THOUGH I SHARE THIS ANGER OF YOURS.

PANEL TWO
Sam stands head-to-head with him with fists clenched.

SAM: YOU WANT TO FIGHT ME, JeMERIK?
JeMERIK: IT IS A STRUGGLE ENTIRELY WITHOUT REASON BUT---
JeMERIK: YES. I DO.

PANEL THREE
Zanni calls out to them as they do the Mexican Standoff.

ZANNI: YOU CAN'T DO THIS!
ZANNI: A FIGHT BETWEEN YOU TWO WOULD DESTROY THE BITTERLUCK!

PANEL FOUR
JeMerik has retained his composure and smiles slightly in close-up.

JeMERIK: ZANNI IS RIGHT.
JeMERIK: THAT LEAVES ONLY ONE COURSE OF ACTION, SAMANDAHL REY.

PAGE TWENTY
PANEL ONE
Sam is left staring at the place where JeMerik was a moment before. Zanni is behind him.

SAM: GONE.
SAM: THE COWARD.
ZANII: JeMERIK WAS MAKING SENSE. A LOT MORE THAN YOU ARE, SAM.
ZANNI: WHAT HAPPENED ON DELASSIA?

PANEL TWO
Sam turns to her and takes one of her hands in his.

SAM: YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.
ZANNI: SAM?
SAM: YOU HAVE TO KNOW THAT, ZANNI.

PANEL THREE
They speak. Sam is earnest and Zanni looks frightened.

SAM: OF ALL THE THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO ME I THINK THIS IS THE WORST.
ZANNI: JUST TELL ME, SAM.
SAM: I BETRAYED YOU. I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS DOING IT. JeMERIK CAME TO ME AND---

PANEL FOUR
Jons is braced in the doorway as though he's just rushed up. He speaks to the pair of them in an urgent manner.

JONS: HATE TO BREAK THIS UP, PEOPLE---
JONS: ---BUT WE GOT BIG TROUBLE!

PAGES TWENTY ONE and TWENTY TWO
BIG SPREAD
A Planetary Union fleet of warships completely encircles the Bitterluck which looks teeny-tiny surrounded by these behemoth ships.

ELECTRONIC: HAILING THE BITTERLUCK.
ELECTRONIC: THIS IS ADMIRAL UMPALA OF THE MAIN PLANETARY UNION BATTLE FLEET.
ELECTRONIC: MAKE NO EFFORT TO ESCAPE OR POWER UP DEFENSES.
ELECTRONIC: IS COMMANDER SAMANDAHL REY ABOARD?
FROM BITTERLUCK: (SAM) I AM.

PAGE TWENTY THREE
SPLASH

Sam, Zanni, Holo-Roiya and Jons Mith stand before an enormous holo-projection of Admiral Umpala (the dude with the half-plexiglass face) looking stern.

ELECTRONIC: WORD REACHED THE PLANETARY COUNCIL OF YOUR FORCED EVACUATION OF DELASSIA.
ELECTRONIC: AND THE UNAUTHORIZED DESTRUCTION OF HADRADI.
ELECTRONIC: YOU ARE HEREBY RELIEVED OF ALL POWERS GRANTED BY YOUR RANK.
ELECTRONIC: YOU WILL COME WITH US ABOARD THE FLAGSHIP TO RETURN TO GAIA.

INSERT PANEL
Closer in on Umpala looking grim and angry. "Real" shot not a display.

UMPALA: I KNOW YOU COULD DESTROY THIS BATTLEFLEET WITH A SHRUG, SAM.
UMPALA: BUT IF YOU'RE REALLY INTERESTED IN SAVING LIVES, THEN IT'S TIME TO COME WITH US AND DISCUSS THIS SO-CALLED INVASION.

THE END OF SIGIL...
BUT THE BATTLE CONTINUES IN THE WAR!

THE FULL, EPIC SAGA OF GALACTIC MERCENARY SAMANDAHL REY!

When Sam suddenly receives the Sigil — a mark burned into his chest that grants him access to vast power, but without any instruction or control — it makes him a deadly weapon…but also a target! Against the backdrop of war between the Planetary Union and the Saurians, Sam and his ragtag crew must travel the cosmos, battling their enemies and trying to unravel the mystery of the Sigil!

COLLECTING *SIGIL (2000) #1-42*, *CROSSGEN CHRONICLES #4*, *SAURIANS: UNNATURAL SELECTION #1-2* AND MATERIAL FROM *CROSSGEN CHRONICLES #1* — WRITTEN BY BARBARA KESEL, MARK WAID, CHUCK DIXON AND TONY BEDARD; AND ILLUSTRATED BY BEN LAI, STEVE McNIVEN, KEVIN SHARPE, SCOT EATON, PAUL PELLETIER, EDUARDO BARRETO, RUDY NEBRES, ANDY SMITH, FABRIZIO FIORENTINO, DALE EAGLESHAM, RON WAGNER, ANDREA DI VITO AND GEORGE PÉREZ.

T+

MARVEL